

so far in running

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so far in running

by [myicedcoffee](#)

Summary

"I bet you a month's worth of compsci homework and a muffin that you can't make it through all two weeks of winter break without breaking and telling your mum the truth."

That's probably the stupidest thing Dream had ever heard come out of George's mouth, and that was saying a lot, but saying no to George had proven to be an unnecessarily hard thing to do.

So, of course, Dream finds himself looking George dead in the face yet again, holding his hand out to shake on it.

'Deal,' he grumbles, but he can feel the grin tugging on his face, and he knows George can see it too.

or,

Chocolate chip muffins, a bet, and a fake relationship. What could go wrong?

How Bad Could It Be?

Chapter Notes

this fic as a whole was originally based on the song *sofarinrunning* by *raccoontour* (highly recommend, i adore *raccoontour*), however, i wrote this entire chapter while listening to how bad can i be from the *lorax* on loop and i feel like that's worth sharing. jokes aside this is the first fic i've written in quite a bit n im glad to be able to get back into it in a fandom that i genuinely enjoy & a writing style im happy with [: enjoy !

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“This is bullshit, Karl. You *completely* half-assed your own dare, you can’t tell me I didn’t do mine right! That’s not fair!”

Dream chuckles, letting his eyes close as he feels the soft material of the chair behind his head and watches the soft lights emitting from the LEDs dance over his eyelids. His friends’ arguing starts to grow quieter as he slips away, feeling the pull of sleep tug on him already. Just before he drifts off completely, a shrill voice rings through the small room. Dream jerks awake, eyes open and suddenly alert.

“*Dream!* Earth to Dream? Did you hear me?”

Dream looks over to George, feeling a sheepish smile creep across his face as he shifts in his spot, moving his knees into a criss-cross position. “No, sorry. I’m a little sleepy, long day of classes. What’d you say?”

George rolls his eyes. “I *said* that since Karl is being a *pissbaby*, it’s your turn for truth or dare. I’m done playing with that *cheater*,” he says, directing the last bit at Karl, who just makes a face at him before turning back to Sapnap.

He snorts. “George, truth or dare is a game for, like, 7th graders. I don’t want to play.” He can already feel his eyes getting heavy again and he’s about to go back to resting his head on the armchair behind him when Sapnap pipes up from the corner of the room.

“Dude, what are you, a pussy? All the rest of us have already played a round, it’s your turn. Why’d you want to hang with us tonight if you weren’t gonna actually *do* anything?”

“This is my dorm, Sap. You’re sitting on my bed.”

Sapnap looks down at the bed and back up at Dream, looking at him for a moment before shrugging his shoulders and laying back against the wall. “C’mon, Dream. There’s nothing else to do, and you can’t sleep in your nice, warm, cozy bed until I leave,” he laughs. Dream sighs.

“And you’ll leave if I play your dumbass game?”

“Not with that attitude, I won’t!”

Dream rolls his eyes, letting out an exaggerated breath. He doesn’t respond, opting to glare at Sapnap instead, hoping he’ll eventually give it up and he can finally get some rest. He’d barely slept for the past few days, and he was desperate for more than 3 hours of sleep.

But of course he wasn't going to get that. Of course it could never be that easy.

"Truth, or *dare*," Sapnap says, leaning forward slightly with a shit eating grin plastered across his face.

He wasn't getting out of this.

"Dare."

Sapnap's grin grows even wider, and he sits up slightly as he makes a big show of tapping his finger on his chin and saying "*hmmm*" at loud intervals. As Sapnap's smile grows bigger and bigger, Dream's exasperation grows with it. He just wants to be done and go to sleep, and Sapnap was making that *unnecessarily* hard.

"Sapnap, come on, fucking spit it out! This is so *stupid*!"

"Okay, fine! I dare you... to go against George in a round of drunk Jenga. If you lose, you have to give him your mom's number. If you win, he has to make breakfast every day for the next month."

"Dude, that's complete horseshit. I lose either way, George's cooking sucks."

Sapnap shrugs. "Take it or leave it, man. But if you leave it there's a penalty."

Dream takes it, knowing the "penalty" is undoubtedly being unable to sleep in his bed. But that doesn't mean he's happy about it.

Dream *sucks* at Jenga, and he can feel the floor begin to sway beneath him as he continuously knocks the tower down and drinks more and more. He knows he's going to lose no matter what, there are only two rounds left and his head feels like a rock, but there's no way he's going out without a fight.

"No, no, no, son of a *bitch*, I'm going to *kill* you, George! What the hell?"

George doubles over with uncontrollable giggles at the sight of Dream's incredulous expression. Dream had been so close to actually winning a round, he had almost gotten the final block he needed without messing up, when George slid his arms around Dream and started *tickling* him.

"That was cheating! You fucking cheated, George, what the hell!" Dream lunges towards him and George shrieks, darting away and shaking his head.

"It doesn't matter, *Dream*. You were gonna lose either way, at least I know how to make things interesting."

"I'd hardly call cheating '*making things interesting*,'" Dream scowls. He leans over and snatches George's phone from his hands, throwing one last glare at him before punching in George's password and then his mom's phone number. He throws the phone back at George, missing him and letting it bounce off the bed while he stands up, stretching his arms out and turning away from George and the bed that Sapnap and Karl are sitting on.

He ignores George's whines about his phone and makes his way over to the minifridge tucked behind the couch. He reaches in to grab a water bottle, noticing the sudden silence from the other side of the room. He wants nothing more than to sit back down and close his eyes, relishing in the newfound peace, but he knows it won't last. He lets out one last long breath before turning back to face his friends, and is surprised to see them huddled together on the bed, giggling like idiots and pointing at George's phone.

Yeah, they definitely did something Dream was about to fucking hate.

Taking a long swig from the bottle of water, he flops down onto the bed next to them and cranes his neck to look at George's phone, and he can't say he's surprised when he sees them actually putting his mom's number to use. He's about to laugh it off and get back up, maybe try to finally kick them all out since it was nearing two in the morning, when he does a double take and stares at the screen with an incredulous look on his face.

"George?"

No response.

He leans over, flicking his friend on the shoulder in an attempt to gain his attention back. "*George*, what the hell is that tex-"

He's cut short by Sapnap slapping down the hand that he had raised to grab the phone, who then pushes him over onto the floor and turns back, snickering, to George and Karl without a second glance. Dream pushes himself up and stumbles over to the desk in the far corner of the room, grumbling and laying his head down on the surface of the desk after crossing his legs on the chair and pulling them close.

If there was one good thing about his friends acting like a bunch of middle schoolers, it was that he could finally get his long-awaited good night's sleep, and his mumbles about *unfairness* and *betrayal* cease as he passes out cold the second his head hits his arms.

"I'm not angry, George. Just disappointed."

Dream tries to fight the grin off his face as he gently turns back and forth in his chair, eyes sliding over the soft glow of rainbow light that his keyboard and monitors cast over his desk and legs. He spins around to look at George as he speaks to see him sitting on the floor, rolling his eyes and leaning against the foot of the bed behind him.

"Oh, come on, Dream," he says with a light scoff. "It was a joke. I was *joking*."

Dream looks away and feigns ignorance, fixing his gaze on a particularly interesting spot of drywall about 4 feet away instead. When he remains unresponsive, George shifts slightly in his spot and clears his throat softly.

"So, um... you aren't actually mad at me for this?" he says, phrasing it as a question rather than a definite statement. "Because I can text her right now and tell her I was just joking, we were drunk and having fun, I wasn't trying to upset yo-"

Dream cuts him off, finally swivelling his chair back in George's direction when he decides he's tormented him enough. He sighs dramatically. "No, it's fine, George. I really don't mind, I'm not mad at you." He lets a slight grin creep across his face, trying to hold back the bubbling laughter he knows will inevitably force its way out of his mouth.

George drops his expression of concern immediately. "So I can tell her to expect me home for Christmas this year?" he deadpans, leaning back onto his hands and looking Dream dead in the eyes.

Of course George saw through Dream's bullshit. He'd known him for years, messing with George had become increasingly difficult. Of *course*.

Dream can feel George watching him as he splutters for a moment, feeling a warm light creep its way up his neck and onto his face. He tries (and fails, miserably) to quickly replace the look on his face with a look of indignity as he sits up straighter in his chair. "George, just because you told my mother we're dating doesn't mean we actually *are*," he says with a scowl. What he feels is a very obviously forced scowl, but a scowl nonetheless.

He'd say he's doing pretty well at maintaining his composure.

George snickers. "Technically this is your fault. You'd be fine right now if you weren't complete shit at Jenga. It's your fault I got your mum's number in the first place."

"Yeah, but I gave you her number as a *joke*, George. On a dare? You're the one who decided it was a good idea to tell her you were my boyfriend."

"I'm just surprised she believed me. I mean, she welcomed me to the family and then said something about apple and pear soup for dinner? You can't blame me, I thought she was joking until she called us, I didn't really know how to deny it at that point."

Dream shakes his head. He's quiet for a moment, carefully calculating his next move. As much as he loves to mess with George, he didn't feel like risking his dignity to do so was anywhere remotely close to being worth it. Before he's able to tell George to grow up and tell his poor mother that he doesn't actually have a boyfriend, he opens his mouth and beats him to it.

"Dream, do you want to make a bet?"

The smug look on George's face and the cocky undertones in his voice were enough to tell Dream that no, he definitely did not want to make a bet, but George was looking up at him and he was smiling and he still looked half asleep and *fuck*. How could he say no?

He let out a long breath before speaking, smiling softly at George. "Sure, why not. What's the bet?"

"I bet you a month's worth of compsci homework and a muffin that you can't make it through all two weeks of winter break without screwing up and telling your mum the truth."

"*What?*" he bursts out, taking a second to comprehend what George just said. "No way, I have to go home for winter break, you're so stupid."

"Yeah, but you're going to do it anyway."

That's probably the stupidest thing Dream had ever heard come out of George's mouth, and that was saying a lot. George came up with stupid ideas all the time, always voicing them to Dream and never failing to rope him into them. He'd have hoped that this wouldn't be one of those times, but saying no to his best friend had proven to be an unnecessarily hard thing to do.

So, of course, Dream finds himself looking George dead in the face yet again, holding his hand out to shake on it.

"Deal," he grumbles, but he can feel the grin tugging on his face, and he knows George can see it too. Pulling his hand away just before George reaches to grab it, he tilts his head, sticking his tongue between his teeth. "*But*, only if it's a chocolate chip muffin."

George rolls his eyes, but the goofy smile is still on his face as he reluctantly pushes himself up and reaches down to grab his backpack. "Alright, Dream. A chocolate chip muffin. You're such an idiot."

He reaches for the doorknob, wincing at the bright fluorescent lights in the hallway before stepping out with a smile and a small wave and heading off to his class, leaving Dream to wallow in immediate regret.

“Wakey wakey, eggs and bakey!”

George groans, slowly stirring and lifting a hand up to rub his eyes. He sits up, scowling at Dream, who’d tugged his blankets off and moved to stand in the doorway.

“You’re so stupid, be quieter, what time even is it,” he mumbles, swinging his legs over the edge of his bed and stumbling as he slowly stands.

Dream smiles. He crosses his arms and leans against the doorframe, ignoring George’s question. “George, you’re the one who came up with this dumbass fake dating idea in the first place. You want to be stuck doing my homework for a month? Be my guest.”

George shoots him a look, but goes about getting ready nonetheless, grumbling as he makes his way to the closet and grasps for the first shirt he sees.

Dream jolts as Sapnap barrels into his shoulder as he fails to dodge around him to grab his bag and head back downstairs.

“Guys, it’s 6:47, get your asses in the car. God, it’s like I’m the only one who cares about this trip,” Sapnap half-jokes from halfway down the stairwell, earning a few annoyed hushes from other tired students on his way down.

Shaking his head, Dream grabs George’s arm when he sees George moving to search for food in the minifridge, dragging him out the door and ignoring his whining protests as he struggles to shoulder both of their bags and scoop up their pillows.

“George, we’re already late, we can just get food from Sonic on the way, I promise, and you can sleep in the car, but we have to go now if we wanna make it there on time.”

“Dream, get off me, what are you doing, you’re crushing my legs-”

Dream scoffs. He’s been reaching over George’s lap and struggling to single-handedly unzip his duffle bag for what feels like an hour (it’s actually been three minutes, and he’s painfully aware of that), and he’s about had enough. They’ve been driving for over two hours and he just wants to snuggle up with his hoodie and pillow and go the hell to sleep. Unfortunately, just like everything else in his life, it’s proving to be *unnecessarily* hard.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, George, is this inconveniencing you?” he asks, and he hopes the sarcasm is as evident in his tired voice as he’s trying to make it. “You know, this sure would go a lot faster if you would just reach down and unzip the goddamn bag for me.”

Sapnap sighs from the front seat. He adjusts the mirror to look at Dream and George and shakes his head, glancing back and forth between his friends and the road.

“Can’t you two get along for five minutes? George, just help him out, man. He’s driving next and I don’t want to put my life in the hands of a cranky sleep deprived Florida man,” he scolds, and although he’s joking, neither Dream or George protest. Dream isn’t exactly known to be the

greatest driver, and he doesn't quite trust himself behind the wheel in this state, either.

George swats Dream's hand away and unzips his bag, pulling out an old (and honestly foul-smelling) football hoodie. He tosses it across the seat at Dream without looking, not bothering to replace the stray socks that had come out with it before yanking the zipper back into place.

Dream picks the hoodie up gratefully and tugs it over his head. He considers thanking George but the other man is already curling back into himself on the other side of the car, out cold, and he knows he'll be screwed if he's the cause of George being woken up.

Sighing, he readjusts his blanket and repositions the pillow behind his head, careful to avoid letting his legs brush George's when he stretches out across the seat and tries to settle in for a nap.

Chapter End Notes

how are we feeling. i DO take constructive criticism. im aware this chapter was pretty short n boring i really just wanted to establish the plot and still be able to separate everything else into the other chapters, & im happy with it nonetheless. i have 2 more chapters written i think? i honestly doubt very many people are going to read this fic but i appreciate all of you who do! see y'all in the next chapter? [:

Dream is a Pissbaby

Chapter Notes

i meant to post this chapter a couple days ago (i try to keep a weekly upload schedule) but i ended up being weirdly busy & didn't get a chance to, sorry about that! but i'm alive and back and we have a significantly longer chapter this time [:

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“We have officially arrived! Casa de- what the fuck, Sapnap?” Dream stops midway through brandishing his arms dramatically in the direction of his childhood home when he feels a crumpled up McDonald’s bag hit the back of his head.

They’d stopped about an hour ago and spent what Sapnap had described as “a fortune worthy of Mike Zuckerberg himself” on chicken nuggets and milkshakes, and Sapnap had taken to bitterly tossing the garbage at their heads when George had tried to interject with an “it’s Mark, not Mike. God, Snapmap, I knew your weiner was built like a tic tac, but I didn’t know your brain was too.”

He turns around to see Sapnap shrug and swing open the car door with a proclamation that he isn’t helping either of them bring their shit inside. Dream sighs and opens his own door, stepping out of the car and stretching his back dramatically before opening the door to the backseat and leaning in to wake George up.

He gently shakes George’s shoulder with a soft “Wake up, George, we’re here.” George stirs, groaning as he tries to violently rub the sleepiness out of his eyes. Verbally cursing whatever gods were cruel enough to invent sleep, he half leans, half flops over the length of the backseat to pull both his and Dream’s bags towards the door.

Dream smiles gratefully and slings both bags over his shoulder as he waits patiently for George to hop out and walk ahead of him. They make their way up the stone path and stop before the patio steps. Dream turns to George, partially to reassure himself that the other man is conscious enough to hold a conversation and partially to make eye contact with him as he speaks.

“Okay, remember, my mom thinks we’re dating and we have to keep up that image so oh, my god, I’m just now realizing we forgot to come up with a backstory,” Dream says, mentally face palming at his lack of planning.

George, on the other hand, just shrugs. “It doesn’t really matter. We’ll just tell your mum how we actually met, and fog up the details a bit to make it more...” He trails off for a moment, voice faltering slightly before continuing. “I don’t know, romantic or whatever.”

“Right, and it would be that simple, if I hadn’t forgotten to tell you that it’s not just my mom. We’re actually gonna have a lot of family around for the holidays, so the pressure’s kind of on to keep this going. Call me crazy, but I’d prefer not to become the family embarrassment,” Dream admits, scratching at the back of his neck and readjusting the straps on his shoulder.

George somehow just seems completely unworried, simply turning on his heel with an “it’ll be fine, it’s not that big of a deal, you big baby.” He swings around the banister of the patio stairs and bounds up the steps to catch up with Sapnap.

Dream watches him with an incredulous look, wondering how he could be so casual about this, and eventually follows him. When they reach the door, he leans over and holds down the doorbell, listening to the familiar sound ring out. He hears shuffling and a quiet thud from the entrance hallway, and the front door swings open.

The three boys are immediately greeted by the overwhelming scent of something burning wafting out of the house. Dream's mom is already hurrying back down the hallway and into the kitchen, calling out behind her for Dream to show the other two inside.

When they make their way through the entryway, they're bombarded by bright red and green everywhere. Dream's mother had always been the type to go all out for any and all holidays, and Dream couldn't recall a holiday when the house wasn't decked out in enough decorations to fill the White House itself. Sapnap snorts at the nativity scene, in which baby Jesus was painted to look like Minecraft Steve- Drista's idea, while George lightly swats at his shoulder, and Dream thinks he can almost hear him hiss "don't be *rude*, Sapnap. That's Jesus."

Dream leads the way into the living room and motions for the other two boys to sit on the couch. "Make yourselves at home, I'll be back in a minute. I just want to talk to my mom really quick," he says, grabbing the remote and tossing it to Sapnap.

He watches with a smile as Sapnap catches the remote and immediately flops onto the couch with a content sigh, George hesitantly following soon after. The two dissolve into meaningless bickering over the TV and Dream turns around, sliding the kitchen door open and walking inside.

"Jesus Christ, Mom, what-" he stops short, frantically waving a hand in front of his face and doubling over, hands on his knees as he coughs. When he recovers, he reaches up to help his mom fan away the smoke in the kitchen before it can set off the smoke detectors.

Once the smoke has finally cleared, Dream turns to his mom with a questioning look.

"So... I burnt the cookies," she sighs.

Chuckling, Dream crosses the small kitchen floor to envelop her in a hug, mumbling late greetings. He pulls back and tosses the rag he'd been using onto the counter behind him, saying, "Did you? I hadn't noticed."

He shakes his head, rolling his eyes with a smile when his mom fakes offense. "It's fine, Mom, I can wrangle George and Sap to help me bake a fresh batch."

"Oh, George, he's your new boyfriend, isn't he? Sorry I didn't get a chance to say hello properly when you boys got here," she says, her face apologetic.

Dream gives a small shake of his head, waving a dismissive hand as he speaks. "No worries, seriously. You guys'll have plenty of time to get to know him. But don't you think you should maybe, uh, take a nap for now? Before the kids get here?"

"Oh, honey, I'd love to, believe me, but I promised I'd have sweets and if I don't deliver, we're gonna have two hysterical kids underfoot."

Dream lets out a light laugh, saying, "No, really, I bet Sapnap and George'd be happy to help. We'll get everything done, and you rest for a couple hours."

His mom begins to protest, saying that she'd be glad to let them relax after their long drive, but Dream just shakes his head, exasperated. "Honestly, Mom. It'll be fun, and we can chill when we're done. I know the holidays are stressful around here, just get some rest."

She hesitates for a moment, then flashes a grateful smile at Dream and starts to make her way back past the living room and into the hallway. Pausing before she disappears from sight, she says, “Thank you, hon. Just try not to make too much of a mess?”

Dream nods and shoos her away. Holidays were always hectic in his family, but with the stress and the messiness always came a warm feeling of comfort. It was chaotic, but it was familiar. To Dream, they have their routines, and as long as they do them together it doesn’t matter whether it’s smooth sailing or rough seas; it meant a lot to him that he got to show his best friends one of the most important parts of his life. Smiling to himself at the thought, he scrapes the burnt cookies into the trashcan before going into the living room to get George and Sapnap.

“Hey, I promised my mom I’d bake a fresh batch of Christmas cookies before the fam gets here, you guys wanna help?”

“Depends. Are we allowed to eat them? Because if not, then no,” Sapnap pipes up from between two pillows.

“Probably? But you can definitely decorate them, if you want.”

That seems to be enough for Sapnap, who pushes himself up with a dramatic groan and shuffles into the kitchen.

George, however, is still sitting on the couch, scrolling through Netflix. “I’d rather not. I’m not really good at decorating cookies and after being woken up at the asscrack of dawn, I don’t have the mental capacity to deal with you and Sapnap together in a kitchen,” he says without bothering to look back at Dream.

Dream frowns and flings himself over the back of the couch, resting his chin on George’s shoulder. “George, c’mon, you’re my boyfriend. You’re supposed to help me with stuff like this,” he pouts, looking up at George through his lashes.

“Fake boyfriend. I’m not obligated to do anything, do your own chores.”

“It’s not a *chore*, it’s cookies,” he whines, moving his head back and straightening up. “You can watch whatever you want while we do it, and I’ll let you lick the spoon after, *please*, George?”

Letting out a long sigh, George switches the TV off and gets up to walk to the kitchen without a word. Taking that as a yes, Dream follows behind him and when they walk in, Sapnap’s already sorted all of the ingredients onto the counter and has started mixing the dry ingredients together. He sets the open bag of flour down next to the bowl and turns back to keep mixing, flour flying out of the bowl and coating the counter.

“What are you trying to do, speedrun Christmas cookies?” Dream snorts.

Sapnap makes a face at him and throws a small handful of flour in his direction with a muttered “*shut up*.”

Dream’s jaw drops open in surprise. Before he can retaliate, he hears giggling behind him and spins around to glare at his other friend. George, who had been bent over by the counter laughing, suddenly straightens up when he’s hit in the face with a cloud of flour, making him cough and gag.

“Oh my God, Dream, what the hell?” George yells, violently shaking his head in an attempt to get rid of the flour.

Chuckling, Dream walks over and ruffles his hand through George’s hair, coughing when he’s met

with flour falling out of his hair and into Dream's face. "That's- oh, God, hang on- that's what you get for laughing at my misfortune. Jesus, George, you're a terrible boyfriend."

"You're right, I'm the worst, we should just break up," he jokes dryly, ducking away and finally helping Sapnap make the cookie dough.

"Oh, come on now, don't be like that. We can work this out!" Dream snickers, following behind George, who bats his hand away when he tries to sling it around his shoulder and throws a spoon at him, telling him to help.

An hour and a few major messes later, they've finally managed to bake a successful batch of cookies.

"Look, guys, my reindeer cookie is dead. You can see his ribs and stuff, I made 'em out of icing, Dream, look!"

Dream moves to lean over Sapnap's shoulder, pausing in the middle of wiping crumbs off his hands when he sees Sapnap's cookies.

"Sap, that is so *not* funny," he wheezes.

"Dream, I so *did not* ask."

This makes Dream wheeze harder, hitting his hand on the counter as he tries to regain his composure. After a bit, he manages to calm down and looks over to George, whose face is scrunched in concentration as he pipes icing onto his cookies.

"And what are *you* making, George? Lemme see!"

Dream narrowly avoids the elbow jab aimed at his ribs and peers around George to look at his decorated cookies. His eyes widen as he sees his friend's neatly decorated Christmas cookies, glancing at him and smacking his shoulder.

"I thought you said you sucked at decorating cookies!"

Ignoring Dream's exclamation, George moves across the kitchen to pick up one of Sapnap's cookies and take a bite out of it. "Very creative, Hannibal Lecter. Master decorating skills."

Sapnap's sarcastic response is cut off by the doorbell. Excitedly, Dream takes off around the corner to get the door, forgetting about his slippery socks and knocking a whisk off the counter in the process. George calls out behind him, irritated, but Dream waves it off and scrambles to unlock the door, hearing his mom scramble out behind him to greet everyone.

As soon as he opens the door, Dream is bombarded by excited voices and small hands. He hastily steps aside to avoid his cousin darting past his legs, and glances behind him to see George making his way out of the kitchen, eyes wide at the sight of all the new people.

Dream smiles and gestures with his head for George to come and stand next to him, and he does, shrinking into Dream's side and holding onto his sweater sleeve. Dream raises a subtle eyebrow at him, amused, and George shoots him a look that says it's not the time for a joke.

Nodding, Dream turns back to the door, shutting and locking it once everyone's made their way inside. The family exchanges hugs and greetings, Dream scooping up his two younger cousins into

a bear hug.

Once his mom's finally managed to wrangle the kids into the kitchen with the promise of cookies, it calms down and Dream is able to properly greet his aunts, who are both decked out in their, very opposite, holiday attire.

"Who's this?" his aunt asks with a smile, gesturing to George. Dream's face lights up even more as he snakes an arm around George's waist, pulling him into his side playfully.

"This is George! He's my boyfriend, he's staying with us for Christmas. George, meet Sofie and Kay. They're my aunts." He looks away from George, pausing to glance around the room, then continues. "Sapnap's here too, but I have no idea where he went."

His other aunt, Kay, reaches up to jokingly pinch his cheek. "Aw, look at you, all grown up and with a love life of your own. Well, you two'll have to tell us all about that later! Speaking of which, we're still on for dinner, yeah?"

George looks up at Dream, confusion painted clearly on his face. He doesn't say anything, but Dream can tell he wants to complain about having to go out again with no warning.

Dream loosens his grip on George, dropping his hand, but George stays close to his side. "Yeah, definitely. It's been a long day, but I wouldn't miss it for the world. It feels like it's been forever since I've seen you guys," he says, sneaking a look at George, silently pleading with him to keep going a little bit longer.

Sofie smiles and takes Kay's hand, gently tugging her backward and starting towards the hallway. "You boys had better get ready to go, then; it's getting late and I'm sure you're both eager to get to bed," she says before heading off to the guest bedroom, presumably to unpack and freshen up after the drive.

As soon as they're gone, George turns to face Dream and rolls his eyes. "I thought we were gonna get to sleep, do we really have to go out to dinner?"

"Oh, come on, it'll be nice! And it's only, like, 7 o' clock, you literal baby, I think you'll survive," Dream deadpans.

When George doesn't answer, only staring blankly at Dream, the latter sighs. As much as he wants to hate George's flair for the dramatic, he always finds himself doing his best to accommodate him, even when he doesn't seriously need it. He'd be lying if he said it doesn't get on his nerves from time to time, but he wouldn't dare change it.

"If you can just make it through one dinner I promise we can watch whatever you want when we study tomorrow and I won't complain."

With a wide grin, George triumphantly turns to walk through the hallway, and makes it halfway down before realizing he has no idea where he's going. Dream chuckles and watches George stubbornly stop and stand in the middle of the hall, unmoving.

"George, if you need help finding my room, you can just say it," he laughs. George huffs and nods without turning around.

Swinging the door open with a grand sweep of his arms, Dream falters halfway through when he sees his old bedroom. Specifically, the lonely twin bed sitting in the corner of it.

"Oh, shit. I forgot about that."

Hearing a sudden outburst of laughter behind him, he spins to see Sapnap clutching his sides and leaning against the wall.

“Dude, you and George have to share a bed? That’s gonna be so hot- temperature-wise, don’t laugh- oh, my God, it must suck to be you guys!”

“Oh, come on, it’s not *that* bad, we have air conditioning,” Dream hesitates, hoping it isn’t obvious in his voice that he’s uncertain himself.

“No way, I know you wish you were me. I have a room *all* to myself, this week is gonna be so fun. Sayanora, sweatys.” Sapnap shuffles off gleefully, leaving Dream and George to get ready.

“Wait, can’t you just ask your mum for, like, an air mattress or something? Why do we have to share the bed?” George asks while he snaps open his suitcase and rummages through, looking for something at least semi-nice to wear. Dream follows suit as he opens his mouth to answer.

“Well, I mean, we’re dating, right? And couples usually sleep together? I think it’ll look weird if we don’t want to share a bed. I can sleep on the floor, but my family thinks we’re comfortable with each other.”

“We *are* comfortable with each other, we’re best friends,” George says, finally deciding on a clean pair of jeans and a shirt with a jacket that has a small smiley face drawn on it.

Dream raises his voice to reach George as the latter closes himself in the bathroom connected to Dream’s bedroom to change. “You know what I mean. We’ll figure it out, don’t worry about it. And giving up is always an option, George, if it’s too much for you you can just come clean and get your own bed,” he shouts with a grin, pulling on a clean shirt and fixing his hair before messily tossing his unzipped suitcase in the corner and waiting for George.

“You’re so annoying, is that your only ultimatum? I don’t care, I was just *wondering*.” George walks out and straight past Dream without a second glance. Calling for him to wait up, Dream speedwalks after him and out to the car where his aunts are waiting.

“Table for four, please?”

“Of course. Follow me, right this way.”

The waitress leads the group to a table, seating them and excusing herself with a smile after promising to be back soon to take their orders. Once they’ve sat down, everyone settles into friendly conversation.

“So, what’s the story?” Sofie asks, smiling expectantly at the two boys sitting across from her and Kay.

Dream looks up from his menu with a hum. “Story? What story?”

Kay leans over to playfully smack him on the head with her menu. “She means how did you two meet, dummy.”

“Oh! Oh, well, we, uh...Georgie, why don’t you tell them?” he deflects, lightly kicking what he hopes is George’s leg under the table. George scrunches his nose with a small smile at the name, but tells the story as enthusiastically as he can manage.

“Oh, okay. Well, Dream is my roommate, so that’s technically how we met in the first place. He was honestly really annoying at first- ow, Dream, stop kicking me- but we started studying together for compsci class and found out we actually have a lot of similar interests. We started hanging out more and he spent a whole week joking about being my valentine, but then we somehow ended up actually going on a Valentine’s day date and got together,” George finishes, fidgeting with a napkin.

“That’s sweet. It must be nice to live with your boyfriend, yeah?” Kay raises her eyebrows, looking at Dream.

Dream shrugs, nodding noncommittally. “It is, usually. He’s pretty annoying too. He talks in his sleep and hogs literally everything.”

That wasn’t completely untrue, Dream had heard George talking in his sleep before, and there had been nights where his loud nonsense had kept him up until early hours of the morning. He doesn’t actually mind that much, though he’d never let George know that.

George scoffs and rolls his eyes. “If it’s so annoying, sleep in your own bed. Problem solved,” he jokes.

Dream feigns hurt, clutching at his chest above his heart. He leans over and takes George’s hand dramatically in his own, holding it to his chest as he talks. “Oh, George, I wouldn’t dream of it. I still love you-” he pauses, abruptly dropping his hand before turning away again. “-I just don’t love your sleep talking.”

George flushes as he moves his hand back to his menu, shaking his head instead of answering.

The group falls into easy conversation, talking about why George chose college in America, and telling him enthusiastically about the rest of their family, only pausing to order when the waitress comes back.

At one point, Dream’s “coming out” story- though he likes to think of it as more of a mortifying “I got outed in the worst way possible” story- gets brought up, and his fork clatters against his plate as he frantically waves his hands, choking on his food in his haste to shut Sofie up before she can get too far into the story.

“No, I’m being deadly serious. His mom calls it the pissbaby story and it is honest to god the best thing you’ll ever-”

“*Sofie*, Sofie, please, if you love me, you won’t tell George what happened. I am begging you,” Dream pleadingly half-yells and quiets down sheepishly when George gives him a pointed look that says “*there are other people in this restaurant, dipshit.*”

“No. George, you have to hear this. This one morning at the beginning of summer break in highschool, his mom walked into his room to drop off a load of clean laundry, right? And when she walks in, she sees Dream just standing there, next to his bed, and he’s-”

Dream quickly reaches across the table, clamping a hand over her mouth. George watches with an amused look, clearly curious now about whatever it was that Dream didn’t want to tell him. “Okay, seriously, Sofie, *please*. That’s really not something George needs to know and it’s a gross topic to talk about while we’re eating and I-” he says desperately, cut off by Sofie batting his hand away and rolling her eyes.

“Okay, drama queen. You’re no fun. It looks like everyone’s finished eating, are you guys ready to

get going?"

Dream nods, his face burning, standing up. He avoids George's gaze as he makes his way to the exit, his head down and eyes fixed stubbornly on the floor. He can feel George staring at the back of his head, and he refuses to look up at him. However, George speeds up to walk next to him and bumps his shoulder with his own, looking up at him and moving his head around in an attempt to make it into Dream's field of vision.

"So-"

"No," Dream firmly states, hearing the smirk in George's voice and absolutely not wanting to deal with his dumbass remarks. They all make their way out to the car silently and Dream spends the entire car ride home trying to calm his flushed face.

Opening the front door and seeing Sapnap draped over the couch, Dream raises an eyebrow and walks over, hitting his socked foot with the back of his hand to get his attention.

"Sap, what're you doing on the couch?"

Sapnap furrows his brow and flips over, burying his face in the couch cushion. "Your dumbass cousins are sleeping in my guest room," he grumbles, his voice muffled.

Dream bursts out laughing before he can help it, and George frantically tries to quiet him down between his strained wheezes and teasing exclamations before he wakes anyone up, leading him back to the bedroom and closing the door behind them.

Chapter End Notes

when i said "slow burn" i meant it btw [: i also didn't originally plan to end this chapter so abruptly but i ended up chopping it up and splitting it into the next chapter bc it was too long with the last bit that i had written so if it's weird that's why LMAO
thank you for reading, remember to take care of yourself, stay hydrated and safe [:

Maybe Having a Cute Fake Boyfriend Isn't That Bad After All

Chapter Notes

i wrote this entire chapter in the boston market drive thru because they were short staffed & it took over two hours to get my food. i hope the employee who gave me a free brownie when i told her what i was writing is doing okay right now

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“George, I swear to fucking God, if you don’t move your ass over right this second I am going to punt you out of this goddamn bed. Get your bony knee out of my ass.”

George loudly groans into his pillow. “If my *boniness* bothers you so much why don’t you just sleep on the floor like you said you were going to?”

“You’re the one who suggested I sleep in the bed, dipshit! You were all like ‘it’s more comfortable, I’m fine with it, just don’t be a blanket hog, bla bla bla!’ And now you’re the one with over half the blanket and almost all of the surface space, I haven’t done shit wrong!”

“I’m a guest. I can do what I want, I have a boyfriend pass. You have to let me because you love me,” George says smugly.

Feeling his last nerve start to fray, Dream gathers his pillow and an extra blanket and gets out of bed, laying them out on the floor next to it as he speaks. “I do not love you, and you’re an insufferable brat. Goodnight, George.”

George huffs, reaching over to click off the light. “Whatever, goodnight,” he mutters, offering Dream a vaguely apologetic smile before turning it off.

Dream tosses and turns, seconds turning into minutes, unable to fall asleep. The floor isn’t exactly ideal and he’s never in his life detested their uncarpeted floors more than he does now. He’d die before he admitted defeat to George, though, so he’ll just suffer through it until morning. It’s really not even that bad, and he manages to find a comfortable position and begins finally drifting off to sleep after a few minutes.

“Hey, Dream, are you-”

He was ready to fucking kill this moron.

“No, I am not awake. Go the hell to sleep and leave me alone, it’s the middle of the night,” Dream says bluntly, pulling part of his pillow over his head to cover his ears.

“But I can’t sleep.”

Dream silently screams into his pillow before he sits up, rubbing the bleariness out of his eyes and looking tiredly up at him. “Okay, George, what do you expect me to do about that? Tell you a bedtime story?”

George’s eyes light up at that and Dream can practically see the gears turning in his head, even in the darkness of the room. “You know what? A bedtime story sounds great. There’s this one story

I'd actually *love* to hear."

Dream raises his eyebrows, tiredness momentarily forgotten, not having expected George to take what he said seriously. "What story?" he asks.

"The pissbaby story," George says, leaning over the edge of the bed with a grin.

Immediately, Dream flops back down onto his pillow and throws his blanket over his head.

"Goodnight, George, have a great night, I'll see you in the morning, great talk."

"Come on, it can't be that bad, you're so dramatic. What'd you do, piss the bed?"

When Dream stays silent, George looks down at him. "Wait, you didn't actually-"

"George, I genuinely wish that I *had* just pissed the bed. No, it was a lot worse, and you're never going to hear about it so please just go to sleep because it's midnight and I'm so tired."

George is silent for a short while, and Dream starts to think that maybe he actually listened and went to sleep, but then the other boy pipes up again from the bed and Dream wants to bang his head against the dresser.

"What if I tell you an embarrassing story? Then we'll be even."

Fully ready to deny him again, Dream hesitates when he hears what he said. That doesn't actually sound like the worst idea, which is surprising because it had come from George.

"Okay, that's... not actually a horrible idea," he says slowly, pulling the blanket off his head and sitting back up.

George smiles. "Yes, I knew that'd work. D-"

"But," Dream interrupts, raising a finger. "It has to be a story that genuinely still embarrasses you. Like, a 'keeps you up at night thinking about it' story."

George quickly nods, and Dream sighs, pulling his legs in towards himself and leaning against the wall behind him. "You start."

"I already know what my story is. So, uh, in secondary school- highschool, for you, I think?- I used to go to this coffee shop down the road from my school? And there was this girl who worked there. Maia. I was there, like, every day so I'd see her all the time and she always remembered my order. I kind of had a crush on her, I guess. Before the end of my last year I decided to ask her out, and one of my friends suggested that I do some corny pickup line. It was something really stupid like 'I don't see your number on the specials menu, could I get it anyway?' Long story short, it turns out she was a lesbian and she laughed in my face because she hadn't thought I was that stupid."

Dream snickers, looking down and shaking his head. "Okay, but that's not even that bad. You couldn't have even known-"

"She wore a pride flag pin on her apron."

"George, you're an idiot."

George grabs his pillow and swings it at Dream's face, missing and hitting the wall instead when he ducks. With a small huff, he settles for landing a soft slap on the back of Dream's head and resituates himself in the bed. "Whatever, it's your turn, I kept my end of the bargain."

“Technically I didn’t make any *promises*-”

“*Dream*.”

Dream raises his hands up in surrender. “Okay, okay. Um, okay, so. Pissbaby story. So, senior year was kind of when I figured out that I liked guys, so I spent a lot of that year kind of just, like, experimenting. Well, this one time I had a guy over who ended up staying the night- my mom had no clue he was here- and we both fell asleep in my bed.” Dream pauses, running a hand down his face and loudly sighing before continuing on.

“I woke up at, like, five in the morning and I somehow managed to go to the bathroom in my dream and piss all over the bed. That this poor guy was sleeping in. Obviously I didn’t want to wake him up and be like, ‘hey, I just pissed the bed, would you mind getting up so I can clean it?’ so instead I just cleaned it up without saying a single thing to him and I was like great, I’ll just act like this never happened. But then right when I was standing there getting ready to just go back to sleep, my *mom* opened the door trying to be all quiet so she could drop a basket of laundry off and she saw me standing there and she didn’t say anything for a minute, she just looked really confused. She started, like, looking from me to the guy in my bed and then to the pile of sheets in the corner and the moment I saw the recognition in her eyes was the worst moment of my life. Yeah, so, long story short I was like ‘surprise, I’m bi’ and ever since that moment I’ve had to live with the fact that I didn’t have a normal coming out moment. I pissed the bed and my mom found me with another man. The end.”

George stares blankly down at him, blinking, and slowly asks, "Was it this bed?"

Dream nods, his brow furrowed, and before he can say a word, George suddenly stands up and moves to sit down next to him on the floor.

"You- what are you doing?"

"I'm not sleeping in your piss bed. Scooch over, the floor looks really comfortable all of a sudden," George says matter-of-factly, shuffling his way onto Dream's makeshift bed.

"You're such an idiot. My bed is not filled with piss, you're so annoying. You think I haven't changed the sheets in the past two years?"

“Well, Dream, I wouldn’t put it past you, since apparently you pissed in it at the young and completely normal age of 18.”

"Oh my- okay, George, must you always be so dramatic? Can we please just go to sleep like normal people and forget this ever happened?" Dream pleads in a last-ditch effort to get a few hours of rest.

Trying and failing to hide his smile, George gets up off the floor and crawls back up onto the bed, offering a hand down to Dream. “Yes, I must, but you’re right, I actually am tired now. You should probably sleep in the bed though. The floor’ll give you back problems, it’s hard as hell.”

Dream takes his outstretched hand with a chuckle, hoisting himself up onto the bed with a groan and settling down into the space between George and the wall under the soft comforter. “Probably for the best. Knowing you, you would’ve rolled off the bed at some point and crushed me anyway,” he mumbles, closing his eyes.

He hears a soft laugh from George in acknowledgement, and eventually drifts off to sleep, careful to avoid brushing against the other man when he changes positions in feeble attempts to get more

comfortable.

Dream's been awake for ten minutes, and he hasn't moved a single time since he opened his eyes, and he's not really sure why.

He finds himself staring at the way George's hair sticks up in fluffy tufts around his head from being smooshed between his head and the pillow all night; the completely peaceful look on his face that he doesn't get to see often. The earlier he gets out of bed, the better chance he has at getting a shower before the hot water runs out, but he can't manage to tear himself away from the warmth that George's body radiates underneath the comforter.

He finally lifts himself up onto one elbow and steals one more glance at George, who starts to gently stir. This wasn't a bad thing to wake up to, really. He could see himself-

Oh, fuck. Oh shit, mother of Christ, that was why.

Dream launches himself out of bed, aggressively rubbing at his eyes and telling himself that it's normal to have stupid soft thoughts about your fake boyfriend. The placebo effect, or whatever.

Yeah, that makes sense, he thinks as he hastily brushes his teeth and takes a quick shower. He's just really committing to the role of George's boyfriend. Being this amazing of an actor doesn't come without its downsides, after all.

When he walks out of the bathroom, stretching his arms out above his head with a tired groan, his eyes immediately fall on George, who's just beginning to wake up.

He watches the way George shuffles across the floor of the small room, stifling a yawn with his hand and cursing softly when he drops a pair of sweatpants, and Dream's face softens, a gentle smile on his face as he walks over and pokes his cheek playfully.

"You excited for an eventful day of studying and leisure?" he teases, scooping up the sweatpants George dropped and handing them to him with a smile.

George takes the pants with a small snort and steps around Dream to take his turn in the bathroom. "Yeah, I'm really looking forward to losing my mind over a string of code. It's my ideal way to spend a Saturday."

Dream chuckles to himself, leaving the room and trying to rub the last traces of sleep from his eyes before he gets out to the kitchen.

"Morning, Sapnap, You look like shit. Didn't get much sleep last night?"

Sapnap, who'd been sitting on the counter and staring blankly at the toaster, knocks his head against the fridge behind him. "Ha ha, very funny. No, Dream, I did not get much sleep last night, no thanks to your stupid sister. I could hear her blasting Harry Styles through the wall at three in the morning."

"Hey, I'm not stupid. You're bullying a minor, Sapnap, did you know that?" Drista yells from the living room, brandishing her spoon and looking pointedly over the couch at Sapnap.

He scoffs, turning back to the toaster and yelping when he burns his fingers on the hot bagel he'd grabbed too hastily.

“Can you put a couple more bagels in for me and George? He’s showering right now but I think he’ll be out in a minute and I’m starving,” Dream asks Sapnap, who nods.

“Well, hello to you too, Dream. I’m really glad you decided to put in the effort to say hi to your dear sister, it sure does mean a lot.”

Rolling his eyes, Dream opens the fridge, scanning the shelves before settling on a jug of apple juice. “Sorry, Dris. It’s not my fault you weren’t here when I got home. Where were you, anyway?”

“What do you mean, *where was I*? On the bus, after school, dumbass,” Drista says through a mouthful of cereal.

“Gross, stop talking with your mouth full. What were you doing at school?”

She turns over the back of the couch and shoots Dream a dubious look. “Not all of us start winter break as early as you do. Yesterday was my last day.”

“Morning, what are we talking about?”

Dream turns to see George shuffling into the kitchen, raking a hand through his wet hair and yawning, and finishes pouring two cups of apple juice, handing one to his friend, who accepts it with a grateful hum. “Morning, sleepyhead. Nothing; Sapnap made bagels if you’re hungry.”

With a start, Sapnap hops off the counter. “Shoot, I dozed off, I forgot about the bagels.” He peers into the toaster and breathes a sigh of relief when he sees that neither of them had been burnt. With a hiss he pulls them out and tosses them onto a paper plate, handing it to Dream before heading off, flicking Drista on the shoulder as he passes by her.

“Woah, woah, woah, hang on, is this the famous George I’ve heard so much about?” Drista’s suddenly maneuvering her way through the kitchen, setting her bowl down in the sink and looking up at George.

“Um, yes? You’re Dream’s sister. Drista, right?” George answers as he takes a bagel from Dream and searches for a knife to spread the cream cheese with.

“The one and only. He talks about you all the time, you know. Every time I call him it’s all *oh, George* did this and *George* said that. He-”

“Okay, okay, that’s enough, thank you, Dris. Thank you so much for that,” Dream interrupts.

George pauses his search and lifts his chin, looking at Dream with a cheeky grin. “Aw, Dream, how adorable. You talk to your little sister about me?”

Dream loudly scoffs. “I do *not*. She’s lying, I don’t even like you, why would I spend time talking about you, you’re so dumb.”

“He does. It’s annoying. Ask my mom, she’ll say the same thing.”

Dream claps a hand over Drista’s mouth and pulls away with a groan when she licks his hand.

“It’s okay, Dream, we all know you love me. You don’t have to say it. Unfortunately, I just... don’t feel the same,” George jokes, finally finding the silverware drawer and pulling out a butter knife.

Raising an eyebrow, Dream decides to go along with the bit and moves closer to George, snaking

his arms around his waist from behind and resting his chin on his shoulder. "Come on, Georgie. Don't be that way, just say you love me!"

He feels George tense up under his grip before relaxing again, trying halfheartedly to shake him off. "You wish. Get off, I'm trying to make breakfast."

Dream makes a grab for George's bagel, one arm still on his waist as he takes a bite and tosses it back onto the plate, a triumphant smile on his face. He finally lets go and dodges George's poorly aimed jabs, jumping behind Drista and grabbing her shoulders.

"I'm not a human shield, Dream, man up and deal with your own problems," she scolds, shrugging Dream off and making her way out of the kitchen, snatching up his untouched apple juice on the way despite his loud protests.

With nothing left to protect him, Dream frantically throws his hands up and backs up into the counter.

"Come on, George. Please. You wouldn't attack your poor defenseless *boyfriend*, would you?"

Cornering him, George smiles, a mischievous gleam in his eyes. "I don't know, would I? That does sound like something I'd do."

Dream's eyebrows shoot up and he swallows thickly at the close proximity, suddenly very aware of George's arms brushing against his own, making the hair on his own stand up.

"Get a room, you two."

Startled, George jumps back, whirling around to see Kay strolling into the kitchen and making exaggerated gagging noises at them.

"Aw, good morning to you too," Dream says, grateful for an escape from the increasingly uncomfortable situation.

Kay shoots a glare at him with no real malice behind it and starts opening and closing cupboards, with seemingly no regard for how loud she's being. Dream vaguely worries about waking up anyone who was still sleeping, but shrugs it off and goes back to wolfing down his bagel hungrily and stealing sips of George's apple juice whenever he wasn't looking, earning a kick to the shin when he gets caught.

After a few minutes of ignoring whatever Kay is doing, Dream's curiosity gets the best of him and he asks her what she's looking for.

Kay groans, shoving a strainer back onto the top shelf with a small jump. "Liam asked for waffles and he refuses to eat frozen waffles because apparently they never cook all the way through, so I'm looking for a waffle iron. I'm starting to doubt that your mom even owns one, though."

The noise Dream makes comes from deep within his throat and he stifles a laugh with his hand. He reaches over her shoulder and moves a glass pan, revealing a waffle iron on the very back of the shelf.

"You looked directly at it, like, three times, come on, how'd you miss that?" he chides.

Kay stares absently for a moment, blinking, then lets out a long sigh. "It's not my fault your mother thinks filling cupboards is an olympic sport. What are you even doing with twelve different cake pans, anyway? Feeding the Royal Navy?"

George lets out a snort at that. “Dream, the rest of your family is funny, what happened to you?” he says around a mouthful of food.

“George, I’m hurt. You’d really take her side over mine? Also, ew. Close your mouth, you dork.” Dream pushes George’s chin up and mimics his face when George scrunches his nose in annoyance.

“I’d take anyone’s side over yours, you’re annoying.”

“Okay, come on, you know you love me.”

“Sure, I love you, that doesn’t make you automatically less annoying,” George jokes, playfully shoving Dream away from him and finishing the last bite of his bagel.

“Since you two morons apparently don’t have anything better to do than whatever the hell that just was, why don’t you help me out with breakfast?”

Dream looks over his shoulder and sees Kay looking expectantly at him and George, having plugged in the waffle iron and brought out a bowl and a whisk.

“I’d really rather not,” he sheepishly replies, unable to come up with a decent excuse.

Sighing, she turns back to the fridge, starting to take out what she needs and nodding. “Yeah, I figured. Well, could you two at least keep an eye on Liam for me later? Your mom wants me and Sofie to go with her to finish up the last of the Christmas shopping. Something about spending time with us? We can take James with us, but Liam won’t be able to sit through hours of wandering Walmart.”

George perks up at that, interest piqued. Before he can agree to anything, Dream cuts him off, shaking his head with a warning glare. “We can’t, we have to *study*,” he says, directing the last part at George.

Kay rolls her eyes. “Don’t you boys have another two weeks of winter break? We’re going up to your grandparents’ house in a couple days anyway and it’s really quiet there. You might as well wait, it might even be better there.”

“But-”

“No, Dream, she’s right,” George interrupts. “We’ll have plenty of time to finish the project literally any other day. What, you don’t want to help your poor aunt out with her kids for one day?”

Dream looks at him incredulously. “Don’t put words in my mouth, I didn’t say *that*. I just thought it’d be better to finish it early but if you really want to babysit a kid all day instead then by all means, let’s do that.”

“Yes, let’s do that. We’ll watch Liam today, Kay, Dream is just being a baby.”

Kay spares a grateful look in George’s direction. “Thank you, George. With you around, there might still be hope for Dream yet,” she laughs.

Dream loudly scoffs, pushing away from the counter and starting toward the hallway. “I came here thinking we’d have a good time and I am honestly feeling very attacked right now. Can we at least bring Sapnap along?”

“Dream, why would I care whether you bring Sapnap?”

“I don’t- you know what, fine, I’m gonna go ask him, let me know when it’s time to go,” he grumbles, dramatically sulking down the hallway as George watches.

“He’s such an idiot.”

“He is. You two are cute together.”

George scoffs, looking away to hide the faint blush on his cheeks. “Alright, I should probably go after him. It’s dangerous to leave him alone for too long.”

Going to the mall four days before Christmas probably wasn’t the best idea.

It had been Dream’s idea, and he’d immediately regretted it the second they stepped foot through the doors. It’s overwhelmingly loud, and the group finds themselves having to push through crowds of people just to get into any stores. Liam spends the whole time loudly complaining, whining about his lack of food and overabundance of boredom.

George ended up having to promise him McDonald’s as soon as they were finished, and everyone breathes a sigh of relief when they finally make it to the front of the line.

“And, um... Liam, buddy, what do you want?” Dream asks, glancing down at him after ordering everyone else’s food.

He stands on his tiptoes, leaning over the counter as he squints his eyes to read the menu. “A hamburger Happy Meal and a McNugget Happy Meal, please?”

“*Two* Happy Meals? That’s too much food, you can’t eat all that.”

Liam looks up at Dream, pouting. “Yes I can! I’m a growing boy, I need to eat!”

Raising his eyebrows, Dream gives in, figuring it’s not worth the fight. “Okay, and what he said,” he finishes, once again speaking to the cashier and watching him ring up their order.

They have to wait a lot longer than Dream would’ve liked to get their food, but after a while the order number is eventually called and the group makes their way to a free table, bickering over who sits where.

George gives a cry of protest when Dream sets his bags down on the chair next to him in an attempt to block him from sitting there, and Dream laughs as he watches George push them off with mumbled claims of annoyance, being careful not to let anything spill out of the bags nonetheless.

When Sapnap excuses himself, saying he forgot to fill his soda cup, Dream relishes in the brief relief of silence that isn’t actually all that silent, but by this point he’s subconsciously learned to tune out the background noise of overlapping voices and screaming children.

He passes out everyone’s food, pulling the bag away when he gets to George and laughing at the exasperated look on his face.

“Dream, give me my food, what is your deal today?” George snaps, grabbing at the bag and rolling his eyes at Dream when he finally releases his grip.

Shrugging, Dream pulls out his own meal and starts unwrapping his food, feeling his stomach

growl angrily at him. "Maybe I just like getting a reaction out of you. It's *funny*," he teases, punctuating his sentence by popping a fry into his mouth.

George scoffs and looks away, and Dream isn't sure, but he thinks he can see a light blush dusting his cheeks.

"So... my mom said you guys are boyfriends," Liam casually brings up, talking through a bite of his hamburger and swinging his legs back and forth.

Dream glances up from his food, amused. "Mhm, we are, that's why he's visiting for Christmas this year. I wanted you guys to meet him," he says as he pops a french fry into his mouth.

"So you guys love each other? Does that mean you do the birds and the bees?"

George chokes, soda shooting out of his mouth, which sends Dream into a laughing fit.

"The- what do you mean? Where did you hear about that?" George asks him, the pink flush on his cheeks rapidly growing deeper.

Liam shrugs, biting into another chicken nugget. "Damien from school was talking about it during recess- he's a sixth grader- and he wouldn't tell me what it meant so I asked my mom when I got home and she said that the birds and the bees is something two people do when they love each other."

Dream loses it completely at that. He doubles over, gripping onto the table for dear life as he struggles to catch his breath.

"What the hell did you guys do to Dream? I'm away for two minutes and you've killed the poor man, George, good lord." Sapnap plops down onto his chair, having returned with a soda in one hand and a large stack of napkins in the other.

George, who'd been hiding his face in his hands and mumbling something about idiots, looks up at Sapnap and frowns. "Language, Sapnap. There are kids present. He just-"

"We were talking about the birds and the bees," Liam pipes up.

Sapnap's gaze snaps over to him, eyes wide. "Oh? Why's that?"

"Because- because he was like- I said George was my boyfriend and apparently Sofie told Liam that boyfriends 'do the birds and the bees' because they love each other and I almost peed myself and oh my God I'm going to die," Dream manages to get out through painfully stifled laughter and gasps of air.

Sapnap bites back a smile and punches his straw into his soda cup. "Oh my- you two are such idiots. Liam, dude, do you wanna come with me to the Lego store to get away from these weirdos?" he asks, taking a sip, and his face immediately screws up in disappointment. "Wait, what the fu- what the *frick*? This is *Sprite*, not Coke!"

Liam excitedly jumps up, his food and previous conversation long forgotten at the mention of the Lego store. He pulls on Sapnap's arm, leading him away as he calls a hurried goodbye over his shoulder to Dream and George and ignores Sapnap's protests and attempts to go back for a refill.

"So, looks like it's just me and you now, huh?"

George stares Dream dead in the eyes, his face unamused, and he tosses his empty bag in the

garbage as he stands up. "Yes, and I'm absolutely thrilled about it," he deadpans.

Throwing his head back in exasperation, Dream follows suit, standing up and throwing his garbage in after George's. "Okay, okay, message received. If I stop being annoying will you stop being mean?"

"I'm not being *mean*, I'm responding to your stupidity in a realistic and normal way. That also may be sort of mean. Just a little." George exhales loudly when Dream gives his best attempt at puppy dog eyes and relents. "Yes, okay, I'll be nice if you are. I'm going to Macy's to look for some new sweaters, are you coming with?"

Dream nods but still stands unmoving, pondering whether it would count as annoying to do what he planned on doing next.

"We should probably hold hands while we walk. You know, for effect."

George looks at him, eyebrow raised. "But your cousin went off with Sapnap? There's no one around, there's no reason to."

"Well, yeah, but just in case. You know, for when they come back, it would just make sense," Dream reasons, doing his best to quickly come up with a believable excuse for what he'd just said.

George scoffs. "No, we'll know when they come back, we don't need to hold hands. Now come look at sweaters with me like you said you would," he says as he starts towards the other end of the mall.

"But Georgie, my hands are cold. Freezing, even. I might get frostbite and die and I'll only have you to blame." Dream stops walking, slouching his shoulders in defeat.

"Stop calling me that, you weirdo, I hate that. Have you always been this annoying?"

"Have you always been this stubborn? George, please?"

Sighing, George stops in his tracks and holds out his hand, waiting for Dream to catch up. Dream smiles giddily and takes George's hand in his own, bumping George's shoulder while the latter walks on without looking at him.

They spend a good while wandering around the store before seeing any sweaters, and Dream manages to talk George into buying a matching pair of ugly Christmas sweaters, much to George's ever increasing annoyance. Finally, George spots a sweater he likes, speeding up and tugging Dream's hand impatiently behind him.

"Here, this one, do you see it in blue?" he asks Dream, eyes scanning the rack.

Dream looks intently for a moment, then sees one. "Yeah, right there," he says, pointing to what is indeed a blue version of the sweater George had been looking at.

George steps around the rack, reaching over it with his right hand and grabbing at the hanger instead of just letting go of Dream's hand and picking up the sweater normally. He finally manages to get it and pulls Dream to the fitting rooms, finally releasing his hand and going in with a promise to be back in a minute.

Dream swipes his hand on the leg of his pants, grossed out and quite frankly embarrassed by the amount of sweat that had managed to accumulate on his palm. He sighs as the dark mark it leaves on his jeans, then snaps his head up as he hears the click of the fitting room door.

George leans out through the cracked door, just enough for Dream to see the upper half of his body. “Does this sweater look okay?”

It’s a cable knit sweater, and the dark blue color pairs well with George’s skin and eyes. Dream finds himself staring with his mouth half open, nothing coming out, and forces himself to say something.

“Yeah, it, uh. That sweater looks really good on you,” he stammers out, wincing at the unwelcome crack in his voice and praying to any gods out there that George didn’t notice it.

George smiles widely, ducking back into the room and coming out a minute later with the three sweaters in hand. Walking past Dream, he reaches out to grab his hand again, lacing their fingers together like it’s no big deal, and Dream falters at the casualty of it.

“Dream? Are you okay? Come on, I want to pay for these so we can get out of here,” George says, giving Dream a concerned glance and pulling him gently after him.

Dream shakes himself out of his weird stupor and starts following after George again, trying to ignore the nagging thought in the back of his mind. It isn’t something he particularly feels like acknowledging and he’d rather enjoy the rest of his day, so he mentally shakes off the lingering feeling of uncertainty and focuses his energy on bickering with George over who’s paying while the woman at the counter watches them blankly.

Finally, Dream manages to overpower George’s protests and hands over his credit card just as the two spot Sapnap and Liam bounding toward them.

“Dude, dude, look at what we found,” Sapnap says excitedly, holding a box towards Dream and George.

George takes it amusedly while Dream turns back to take his card and the bag of sweaters. Liam bounces up and down excitedly while he watches George read the box, and grins when George finishes with a laugh and a raised eyebrow. “‘Hagrid’s Hut: Buckbeak’s Rescue’? Sapnap, how much did you spend on this?”

Sapnap grimaces, taking the box of Legos back and handing down to Liam as he talks. “Uh, like, sixty dollars, I think. But it’s totally worth it, Karl’ll be so jealous. And also because Legos are superior.”

He emphasizes his point with a high five to Liam, and they walk off ahead of the group, Sapnap listening while Liam rambles about Harry Potter.

Dream and George follow after, all of them making their way out to the car and tossing their bags into the backseat.

“They’re such idiots, aren’t they?”

Dream looks over his shoulder at the two in the backseat, still intently talking, and shakes his head. “Yeah, but they’re our idiots,” he says, feeling his own face split into a smile at the sight of George’s and starting the car to drive them home.

When they walk through the front door, Dream calls out to let everyone know they’re back, but gets no response.

“Guess they’re all still out,” he says, and collapses onto the couch after locking the door. George follows suit, dropping down on the opposite side with a groan, and Liam moves to sit on the floor in front of the TV and starts unwrapping his new Lego set.

“Can we watch one of the Harry Potter movies?” he asks suddenly, and Dream nods.

“Yeah, sure. I’m not getting up though. There’s a box of movies in the cabinet below the TV if Sap wants to grab it.”

Popping his head around the corner of the kitchen, Ssnap hums. “For sure, no problem. But, only if Dream cuddles with me while we watch,” he jokes, crossing the room and pulling the movies out of the cabinet.

“Hey, back off, Ssnap. If anyone gets to cuddle with Dream, it’s me, I’m his boyfriend,” George interjects, lifting his head up and playfully kicking at Ssnap’s ankle.

Ssnap pretends to sulk, settling on the first movie and popping it into the DVD player before sitting on the edge of the couch and sighing loudly.

“It’s okay, Ssnap, you can come build Legos with me. We don’t need Dream,” Liam offers, and Ssnap joins him on the floor with a soft chuckle.

Dream pulls a pillow into his lap and hugs it, settling in and trying to focus on the movie, but a few minutes in he notices George looking back and forth between him and the TV.

“George? Everything alright?”

George nods. “Yeah, I’m fine. I just... Could we, actually? Cuddle, I mean. I’m cold and you’re sitting under a vent so it’s probably warmer over there,” he quietly asks, avoiding Dream’s gaze.

Dream moves the pillow out of his lap and opens his arms in a silent invitation, and George crawls into them, leaning back on his chest and relaxing after a moment. Dream settles his chin on George’s head, relishing in the warmth the other boy spreads through his body. Before he knows it, his eyes grow heavy and he doesn’t try to fight off the sleep as it slowly overtakes him, and he dozes off under the steady rhythm of George’s breathing and the low murmur of the TV.

Chapter End Notes

dream.exe has stopped working

It's Not Gay If There's Mistletoe

Chapter Notes

hello!! sorry for uploading this slightly later than usual- i left my laptop at home and my phone hates working properly. ive been struggling a bit with writers block lately but overall im happy with how this chapter turned out [:

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Do you think they’re gonna wake up soon? I need the couch cushions and they’re blocking the way.”

“*Shh*, Liam. Lower your voice before you wake them up.”

“But that’s the *point*- no, hey, what? Give me my tablet back! I’m sorry!”

Dream stirs awake, groggily registering the sound of hushed voices and the harsh sunlight streaming in through the open windows; then the heavy weight on top of him.

He tries weakly to push it off, still half asleep, but whatever it is doesn’t budge and instead burrows itself deeper into the fabric of his hoodie. A sharp pain shoots through his neck when he lifts his head, and he winces, struggling to readjust himself underneath the man laying on top of him.

Right, shit. He’d fallen asleep with George on the couch the night before, and was now paying for it with a sore neck and an even sorer back. He makes a mental note not to let it happen again, for the sake of his poor aching bones, and gently extracts his arm from underneath George’s to shake him.

George groans, burying his face in the crook of Dream’s neck. “Five more minutes,” he murmurs, voice muffled.

Dream ignores the heat blooming in his chest at the feeling of George’s skin brushing against his neck, soft and fleeting. Deciding that it’s probably not the end of the world if the day ahead of them waits for just a few more minutes, he complies, absentmindedly tracing circles onto George’s back and matching the steady rhythm of his breathing.

After what he’s pretty sure is around five minutes, he reluctantly pulls back, moving his hands up to tap George’s shoulder and prompt him to sit up.

“George? George, man, you gotta get up. I know, I’m sorry, but my back hurts like hell and I have to *pee*,” he says, trying to keep his voice as low and soft as possible.

He offers an apologetic smile and gently ruffles George’s hair as he begrudgingly lifts his head just enough to peer up at Dream, eyes brimming with the last remnants of sleep.

Dream is sure he’s imagining things, looking for something that’s not there, but he could swear he sees George’s eyes momentarily dip down to his lips. Dream’s breath catches unexpectedly in his throat, but thankfully, before he gets the chance to overthink, George’s eyes are back on his own and he’s pushing himself up and off the couch.

George shuffles around the couch, excusing himself, and Dream is left with a sudden lack of body heat that chills him to his core. He briefly considers curling back in on himself and burying his head under the pillows. His peace is short lived, however, and before long he feels a small hand excitedly tapping on his shin.

“Dream Dream Dream Dream Dream *Dream!* Get up! I need the couch pillows to build my fort and I’ve been waiting for *hours* and you’re in my way!” Liam exclaims, urging Dream up and ushering him impatiently off the couch.

Sighing, Dream resigns himself to the day ahead of him, dragging a hand down his face. He wills himself to wake up as he pads through the hallway to the bathroom and turns the faucet, hissing at the coldness of the water when it hits his face. Straightening up, he lingers in front of the mirror, frowning at the cowlicks that stick up at the back of his head and the water droplets clinging to his jaw.

After a couple of minutes, he grows frustrated with his unsuccessful attempts to flatten his hair and gives up. Suddenly, his stomach growls angrily, startling him, and he decides that instead of ordering takeout or reheating week-old pizza like he normally would, he might as well make the most of the kitchen while he has one.

He makes his way to the kitchen, waving off Kay’s apologies for Liam’s abrupt wake-up call as he passes the living room. Soon, he’s settled into a familiar rhythm, pulling ingredients from shelves and mixing batter. It’s calming, in a way, and as much as he enjoys living at uni with his friends, he can’t deny the relief he feels when he spends time at home during breaks.

He looks up from the bubbling batter when he hears footsteps behind him and mutters a short greeting before turning back and prodding at the pancake with his spatula.

Receiving no response, Dream turns around, curious, and does a double take when he sees George.

George is leaning against the doorframe, face pinched as he preoccupies himself with balancing James on his hip and repeatedly batting away his tiny, persistent hands as the one year old tugs on George’s hair, sending himself into gleeful laughing fits.

“George, why are you holding my baby nephew at 8 a.m. *in the morning*,” Dream says flatly.

George’s head snaps to face him and he lets out a short huff, blowing a stray strand of hair off of his forehead. “8 a.m. in the— I’m still half asleep, I can’t do this. Sofie, like, *speedran* past me in the hallway the second I stepped out of the room and shoved James at me before just leaving.”

He pauses to direct a desperately whispered “*stop!*” at James, and looks back to Dream with pleading eyes. “Could you please just take this stupid baby?”

Dream shakes his head, gesturing with the spatula in his hand as if it should be obvious. “Sorry, George. I can’t cook and hold a baby at the same time. Why’d Sofie leave, did she say?”

“Uh, I think so, she said something about running to the store for formula? I don’t know, I haven’t had time to process being awake.”

“You’re so dramatic. You’re fine, he looks... comfy?”

George pushes for a minute longer, trying to guilt trip Dream by whining about how he doesn’t know what to do if James spits up on him, to which Dream just responds with “clean it?” and goes back to humming as he flips the pancakes out of the pan and onto a plate with a flourish.

When he turns around, he sees to his surprise that George has taken a seat at the kitchen island and is now cooing playfully at a giggling James sat on the counter in front of him. Dream watches fondly as George pokes gentle jabs at James' cheeks, eliciting gleeful laughter that causes the corners of his own mouth to turn up.

Eventually, Dream tears his eyes away from the two boys at the counter to finish the plate of pancakes, cutting himself off mid-course when he accidentally drips syrup onto his hand. He stares at the full plate for a moment, debating, then picks it up and crosses the kitchen to set it down in front of George wordlessly.

George glances up at him, ignoring the insistent pats of James' hand on his cheek at the lack of attention, and his brows knit together momentarily.

"Is that for me?"

Dream shrugs. "Well, yeah, idiot. You need to eat. Now give me my baby so you can eat and I can finish making my own breakfast."

George blocks Dream's outstretched hand before he can pick James up. "I thought you said you couldn't hold a baby and cook at the same time?"

"I lied," Dream says blankly, blinking.

George's raised eyebrow immediately morphs into an annoyed eye roll. "Bastard. Well, what if I don't *want* to hand him over?"

"Then don't." Dream makes a move to return to the stove and stops with a knowing smile when George hastily backtracks, calling after him.

"No, no, I do want you to take him. I'm hungry and he's loud and he's getting in my way."

Dream obliges, happily scooping James up and settling him on his hip, letting his head rest on his right shoulder as he moves through the kitchen. He finishes cooking the rest of the pancake batter as quickly as he can, opting out of washing the bowl properly in favor of soaking it.

Balancing his plate in one hand and James in the other, Dream looks up to catch George watching him intently, an indecipherable look on his face as he rests his chin in his hand. Dream grows restless under his gaze, awkwardly shifting his weight from foot to foot.

"Whatcha looking at?"

The look on George's face dissipates immediately and he goes back to eating without sparing a second glance. "Your hair is sticking up all over."

Dream scowls at him, reaching a hand up self-consciously in a feeble attempt to pat down his feral hair.

They go about the rest of the day lazily, at one point seeking out Sapnap to play Mario Kart, which Drista interrupts, pestering them until they let her join in. Afterwards, they try to watch a movie, but end up arguing so much over their inability to agree on *Legally Blonde* that they get sent out of the house by Dream's mom to take a walk and cool down.

Eventually, when the sun begins to dip below the horizon and the sky develops a dark evening haze, everyone is rounded up to go out for a "surprise", which turns out to be a drive-through light show at the local church.

Most of the ride is spent trying to block out the overlapping sound of Christmas music blasting from the car speakers and the kids screaming obnoxiously every time they see a talking lightbulb or a lit up Santa Claus, but it's not unenjoyable.

At one point during the ride, George drops his head down onto Dream's shoulder in the backseat and his stomach flutters. He knows it's purely as a show for the other people in the car with them, and he feels stupid for caring about such a small action, but it's just so hard, because it's *George*, and getting affection like this is such a rare occurrence with him. It sends his brain spiraling and the worst part is, he can't even place why.

Instead of going straight home once the light show is over, the car pulls into a lot down the road and everyone gets out, clamoring over each other and passing short insults on their way.

Once everyone's made it out of the car and onto solid ground, Liam hopping around and hollering at the sudden coldness of the pavement while Sofie chides him for not wearing shoes, Dream's mom claps her hands together, beckoning the group in to listen as she talks.

"Right, gang— everyone knows the drill. We leave for Grandma and Grandpa's tomorrow, and we have to get a tree to take with us. I wanna do it a little differently this year, though, because quite frankly I am sick and tired of listening to three hours worth of arguing and coming home with a lousy tree at one in the morning. So, we're going to split into teams."

She moves as she speaks, breaking people off into pairs with clipped hand motions. "Dream will be with George, Sofie and Kay with their kids, and Sapnap, you'll be with Drista."

"Ew, but she's so *sweaty*, I don't want to be—"

"*Sapnap*. I love having you here but if you keep insulting my daughter we are going to have issues. I swear, you two are like peas in a pod. Each team will cover a different area of the tree farm, and comes back with *one*," she puts emphasis on the one, as if she doesn't trust them to listen, "tree suggestion and we'll pick from there."

"Wait, Mom, whose team are you on?" Drista asks, cocking her head.

"My own. Duh. Now shoo," she replies, impatiently waving her hands at them.

Dream watches as Sofie kneels down and whispers something in Liam's ear, grinning as she uses her knee to push herself back up and watch the 8 year old run off. Sapnap and Drista follow soon after, breaking off from the group and playfully bickering on their way.

He feels a presence behind him, whirling around to see George standing directly behind his back, moving his eyes from their fixed spot over Dream's shoulder to meet his gaze.

"They're more sibling-y than you and Drista yourselves are, Dream. I think you're being replaced."

Dream snorts at that. "*Sibling-y*, that's not even a word," he counters, starting the trek to the far end of the tree lot without checking to see if George was following him.

"It could be. You don't know, you're not a walking dictionary," George retorts, earning an eye roll from Dream.

They walk in silence for a moment before George breaks it again, wanting to know the whys of the family's apparent annual tradition of getting a Christmas tree so close to Christmas and then driving it three states away.

Shrugging, Dream absentmindedly shoves his hands into his pockets. “My grandparents kind of live in, like, the middle of nowhere. Well, not the middle of nowhere, it’s, like, civilized and stuff, but you know what I mean. Anyway, they started relying on us to provide a tree every year because all the trees there are way too huge to fit in their house and I think the closest tree farm sets up shop an hour away from where they live or something.”

George hums quietly, and then all of a sudden he stops in his tracks, holding out an arm and pointing at something to their left.

It’s a short tree, on the smaller end of five feet tall, and that’s being generous. The deep green of the pine needles stand out in stark contrast against the brittle dimness of the dark sky behind it, which would be nice to look at if it didn’t only serve to emphasize the sparseness in between each thin branch.

“George, tell me you’re not about to suggest that we get that tree.”

George crosses his arms defensively, angling his body towards Dream. “Why not? It’s a perfectly good tree, I think it looks nice.”

Dream scoffs. “Are you kidding? That thing is so *trash*, it’s as shrimpy as you.”

Letting out an indignant cry, George dramatically stomps over to the tree, wrapping his arms awkwardly around the topmost branches and yelping when they scratch his arms. “I’m not shrimpy, why are you like this? It’s a small tree, it’ll definitely fit in your grandparent’s house.”

Dream lets out a long sigh. The tree sucks, like, a lot, and he knows they won’t end up getting this one, and he tells himself that’s the reason he gives in to George. Not because of his dumbass puppy dog eyes or his stupid pouting lips. Definitely not.

“Fine. Stop hugging the goddamn tree, you win. I still think it’s stupid, but you win.”

George smiles, triumphant, and walks back to Dream, waiting as Dream snaps a picture of the tree with his phone before turning to find and meet up with everyone else.

Silence settles over them, filling the air as they walk, almost providing a comfortable sense of warmth. George’s hand brushes against Dream’s every time one of them swings their arm, and he almost wishes that George would reach out and lace his fingers with Dream’s like he had the day prior.

Of course, though, he doesn’t. Because that would be weird.

They reach the lot where they’d parked, finding that everyone else had already grouped back up by the bumper of the car and were exchanging photos, trying to decide on which tree to get.

“Dream, George! What’d you find, show us,” Kay calls out to them, waving the two boys over with a smile.

Dream shakes his head, leaning against the trunk of the car and resting his head in the palm of his hand. “I can’t, I’m ashamed of it.”

Slapping Dream’s arm with a scoff, George sidles up to him and takes his arm, maneuvering it around his shoulders and snuggling into his side. Dream casts a glance down at him, surprised, and sees that he’s shivering, barely noticeable in the overcast, dim atmosphere.

“Are you cold?”

“A little.”

Dream laughs and takes his arm back, eliciting an annoyed protest from the shorter boy. “I told you to bring a jacket, dumbass, it *does* get cold at night,” he says, shrugging off his own sweatshirt and holding it out in a silent offer to George, who eyes it hesitantly before grabbing it and pulling it on.

“Well, sorry I didn’t expect Florida to be cold. My bad, I must be stupid,” he deadpans, voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Careful, Georgie, I might take my sweater back if you don’t start being nice.”

George’s mouth snaps shut almost immediately and he turns away, bundling deeper into the warm fabric.

“Hey, idiots, if you’re done flirting, Mom said she found a cool barn at the back of the tree farm and she wants to go check it out. Snapmap went to help Kay get the tree and then they’ll meet us there,” Drista says, clearing her throat way more loudly than necessary.

Dream takes his eyes off of George, now frowning at his younger sister. “You guys decided on a tree without us?”

Drista throws her hands up, exasperated, as she spins around on her heel. “We didn’t want to interrupt you guys? Sorry for trying to be considerate, it won’t happen again. Promise,” she calls behind her.

The barn that Dream’s mom had found turns out to actually be a nice place to stop and hang out for a minute. There’s a roaring bonfire just outside the doors with logs placed in a rough circle around it as a place for people to sit together, and from inside the barn floats the scent of peppermint and gingerbread. George soon realizes excitedly that there’s a concessions booth inside selling assorted Christmas treats and hurries off with a promise to be back in a minute.

Everyone else settles by the fire, warming their hands by the flames licking the air in glowing orange tendrils. Sapnap cranes his neck to look back into the barn, then turns to Dream with a wicked smile.

“Hey Dream, your *boyfriend* is under the mistletoe.”

It’s now Dream’s turn to whip his head around to look, and he realizes with a start that Sapnap is right. He quickly shakes his head, trying his best to dismiss it before it becomes a thing.

“I’m not going over there, he’s probably gonna come back in a minute anyway.”

So, of course, he ends up going over there, after unrelenting teasing insistence from everyone present.

“Oh, Dream, hi, you have to try this, it’s actually really good,” George says when he sees Dream approach him, offering up his last piece of peppermint bark.

Instead of answering, Dream takes George’s waist in his hands, gesturing with his eyes at the mistletoe hanging above them. George follows his gaze, confusion clearly painted on his face, but brings his free hand up to cover Dream’s hand on his waist anyway.

“What are you-”

“My family is watching, is this okay? Can I?”

Realization slowly dawns on George's face. Before either of them gets the chance to back away, George is pushing himself up onto his tiptoes, pressing his lips to Dream's.

With a trembling hand, Dream reaches up to George's cheek, only lightly ghosting the fiery skin before George pulls away and they lock eyes, neither of them sure enough to make the next move.

God, George is going to be the death of him.

Dream moves his hand back down, instead resting it in a fistful of his jacket. He's the first to break eye contact, his line of vision dipping down to the peppermint bark still in George's hand.

"Can I try that now?" he asks, grinning innocently as George seemingly short circuits under his gaze.

He holds it out, unmoving as Dream lets go of his waist and takes it, popping it into his mouth with a crunch.

"Mm, that actually is really good."

"Uh. Yeah, it is. We should probably..." George trails off, weakly nodding in the direction of everyone else sitting around the bonfire. Dream detaches himself completely and looks to see Drista standing tall on one of the logs, fake-retching and saying something about PDA.

They rejoin the group, ignoring the various "ooooh's" and eyebrow wiggles from the other, albeit more immature, adults.

George falls back into conversation with Sapnap, and Dream listens but doesn't really register any of the words passed between them.

He'd known this realization was inevitable, but that doesn't stop it from hitting him like a truck. Sitting here, listening to the sound of George's laugh ringing out, clear and piercing in the stillness of the night. Looking at the soft curve of his cheeks as he smiles from ear to ear, and the way that the warm light from the fire dances across his face and illuminates the bright shine in his eyes. He finds his eyes trailing down; allows himself to think about the gentle curve of his lips and the buzzing feeling they'd left against his own.

He likes him.

No shit, he likes him. No matter how much he struggles to come to terms with the hard-to-swallow truth, it's nothing new.

Their friendship's always toed the line between platonic, just two homies being dudes, and something more. Dream knows that, and his desperate attempts to avoid the surfacing feelings every time George laughs at his jokes or leans into his touches for as long as he can remember have grandly failed, since the very moment George had first reluctantly asked him to study together.

"Dream? Hey, are you okay?"

Dream blinks, shaking himself out of the zone he'd ended up lost in. "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Just kinda cold."

George snorts. "Maybe you should've brought a jacket, then," he says, emphasizing his point by flipping up the hood on the sweatshirt Dream had given him.

"You— you're so stupid, I hate you," Dream says, but a breathy laugh lilts his voice and he knows it's useless.

It's incredibly early in the morning, still pitch black outside, when Dream is woken up by something moving loudly next to his head.

"George? George, are you okay?" he asks, voice heavy and slightly slurred with sleep.

"Shit, sorry, I'm fine. I'm just— go back to bed; please?"

Growing concerned at the small waver in George's voice, Dream turns his head over on his pillow, the cold fabric dragging across his face and beckoning him back to sleep, to look up at George. The second he registers the blotchy tear tracks on his face, he sits up, now fully awake.

"Are you crying? What's wrong?"

George gives a small laugh, quiet and guarded, and shakes his head. "Seriously, it's stupid. I'm not even like— it's not a big deal or anything, it was literally just a dumb nightmare, and when I woke up from it I just got really homesick all of a sudden. It just happens sometimes, I'll be fine in, like, two minutes."

Judging by the look on George's face, every line and curve of his skin laced with embarrassment and exhaustion, it was a bigger deal than he was letting on, but Dream knew better than to ask about it. It'd happened before, in their dorm, and every time, Dream has just dropped it and gone back to bed.

But now, Dream finds himself wanting to hold him, to kiss it better, hide him away for just a moment.

So he does.

He reaches out and pulls George into his chest in a measured move, and maybe he's crossing a million boundaries as he sits with his best friend enveloped in his embrace, but he doesn't care. Caring for each other is something that best friends do, and he knows George won't think anything of what he's doing, but the thin layer of guilt is there nonetheless.

When George doesn't make any attempts to pull away, settling into Dream's lap with a sigh, Dream cautiously combs his fingers through his friend's hair, settling into a soothing pattern. Then, slowly, as if to escape his own notice and catch even himself by surprise, he presses a gentle kiss into George's hair.

"Thank you," George whispers, and they stay like that for only a moment longer before George abruptly pulls back and crawls back under the comforter.

Dream worries that he'd done something wrong, crossed an unspoken boundary that wasn't meant to be crossed, but just as he's sure George has fallen asleep, George reaches blindly to tug on Dream's sleeve without lifting his head.

"Lay down, you idiot," he mumbles, barely audible.

He guides him to settle back under the blankets with him, this time with his chest flush against George's back and his arm haphazardly slung across his torso, and despite Dream's rapidly beating heart betraying him they fall asleep once more to the comforting feeling of just knowing that the

other was there.

Chapter End Notes

dream idiot arc lets go

Thank God for Ugly Christmas Sweaters

Chapter Notes

hi [: incredibly sorry about the lack of updates- had some stuff going on and had to take a short break from writing but im back now ! hopefully everyone's doing well [:

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If Dream knows one thing, it's that George is not a morning person.

When they'd gotten up, George had grumbled into his pillow and swatted at Dream for ten minutes before Dream finally managed to blast him out of bed, and now, George is adamant on arguing over everything.

The two are stuck in a standoff in the middle of the room, George crossing his arms and pouting against the foot of the bed while Dream sits on the floor and repeatedly bumps his head against the wall behind him, eyes screwed shut.

"You're making such a big deal out of nothing, what is your problem?" he asks, exasperated and already on the verge of reaching his limit.

"It's not nothing! And I'm not making a big deal out of it!" George exclaims as he pushes off of the bed and straightens up with his hands thrown into the air.

"George. I literally said I don't care. You don't have to wear the stupid sweater and we can move on with our stupid lives. *Please.*"

"Well, it *seemed* like you cared, you were the one arguing with me over it. I don't want to wear the sweater but I don't want to be an arse, either."

Dream finally lifts his head, narrowing his eyes at George and ignoring the dull ache at the back of his head where it'd been hitting the wall. "I regret ever agreeing to this bet."

George scoffs. "No you don't."

"I do. I'm seriously considering marching out there right now and telling my entire family that we aren't dating and I actually hate you."

"Oh, please. You love this."

Dream gives up glaring at George in favor of rolling his eyes at him instead, then crosses his arms and fixes his eyes on an old poster with peeling edges in the corner of his old room. "I don't. I actually consider you my mortal enemy, did you know that?"

George barks out a laugh at that. "Okay, Dream, whatever you say. But for the record, I'm pretty sure you think of me as the exact opposite of that."

Dream's head whips around to face George in record time, his gaze meeting George's before the last word is even finished falling from his mouth.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“I’m your best friend, you love me.” George tries to keep a straight face, but the fleeting teasing undertone to his voice gives his amusement away.

Dream breathes out a sigh of relief at George’s words, thankful he hadn’t picked up on his minor moment of panic. “Okay, George, what do I have to do to get you dressed and out of this room? We have to leave and you’re being annoying.”

“You *want* me to get dressed? There’s a first,” George smirks.

“I– George! What does that even mean, oh my God!”

George can’t hold in his laughter anymore, doubling over at the sight of Dream spluttering indignantly from his spot on the ground. When he’s calmed himself down, he moves to sit on the ground in front of Dream, kicking softly at his ankle while he thinks.

Dream tries to ignore the way his heart twinges as the soft, albeit small, action.

George hums thoughtfully, then says, “I’ll wear my sweater if you wear yours?”

“I literally *specifically* said I don’t care about the sweater. All I said was that you would look cute in it and you took that and r–”

“Deal or no deal, Dream?”

Dream stares at him in a deadpan, wondering what events in his life led up to this. Having a crush on his best friend, who just so happens to be the dumbest person on earth. His willingness to do anything for said best friend, who seems to have some sort of pact with himself to come up with at least one stupid idea a day.

Jesus fucking Christ.

“Yeah, deal.”

A grin sneaks across George’s face, and he leans back, balance teetering and arm stretched behind him as he reaches out with his fingertips barely brushing the edge of his duffle bag. With a careful glance back he hooks his ankle around Dream’s to use as an anchor and leans back one final inch, slender fingers finally grasping the fabric. He plucks it out of the suitcase and pulls himself back to face Dream, and–

“That’s my sweater.”

“I know.”

George says this with a pointed look, cautious but firm, and it only serves to deepen Dream’s confusion, threatening to leave his head reeling.

“...I can’t wear my sweater if you’re wearing it?” Dream says slowly, one eyebrow raised as his head tilts to the side.

“Okay? That doesn’t sound like my problem, Dream.”

“It’s literally *only* your– you know what? Nevermind. Keep the sweater. I’ll meet you outside.”

George rolls his eyes, but accepts the helping hand that Dream offers to him once he’s stood up and

uses it to pull himself up after him. Their faces meet for a moment, inches apart, and George's eyes widen right before he twists out of Dream's grip and throws the door open, motioning with his head for Dream to leave.

Weirdo.

Dream is leaning against the hood of the car and running a hand through his hair, beginning to grow impatient, when George finally comes out of the house.

He stares, his mouth agape, eyes raking over George as he tiredly hops down the front steps.

The sweater is a god-awful array of muddy green colors with the word "*Fender*" written on the front in bold red letters, and it should look stupid, should make him *more* undesirable, but it somehow has the opposite effect on Dream. The sleeves bunch over his hands as he reaches up to rub his eyes and Dream feels his breath stutter—the sweater *swamps* him.

And even more importantly, it's *Dream's*.

Dream straightens up, eyes still glued on George as he approaches. He reaches a hand out to ruffle his hair on his way by, and George ducks away with a halfhearted grumble before pulling the car door open and climbing into the back seat, where Sapnap is already sitting. Dream follows after, purposefully hitting Sapnap's knees with his own on the way, and he snickers at Sapnap's cry of annoyance.

"Wait, Sapnap, switch seats with me," George says, tapping Sapnap on the shoulder and trying to maneuver around him, visibly startled by the sudden close proximity between him and Dream and avoiding the place where their legs sat flush against each other just a moment ago.

Dream's eyebrows pull into a soft frown and concern begins to bloom in his chest.

Sapnap gives him a small push and scoffs. "No way, dude, I get the window seat. Besides, you're the smallest, you shouldn't have a problem being in the middle."

"Sapnap," George hisses, and Dream watches in confusion, trying in vain to get situated in his own corner as the two seem to have a silent conversation that results in a dramatic sigh from Sapnap and a smug smile from George.

"You're lucky I'm so nice," Sapnap grumbles, scooting to settle in next to Dream with his arms crossed defensively against his chest.

"Sapnap, you are literally the *furthest* thing from nice," Drista pipes up from the row in front of them, twisting her neck to peer above the seat and stick her tongue out at him in mockery.

"Okay, you guys. Let's try to keep the bickering to a minimum today? It's early and we've got a long drive ahead of us," Dream's mom interjects, starting up the car as she speaks and turning in her seat to watch as she backs out of the driveway.

Dream tries to push down the worry churning in his stomach. He reassures himself that if George were actually uncomfortable he'd say something; of course he would. He repeats it like a mantra in his head, trying to quell the slowly growing concern as he drifts off to the sound of rocks crunching beneath the wheels and the steady tremor of the car caused by the bumpy road.

When Dream awakens, every muscle in his body stiff with the remnants of a cramped rest, the sun is shining brightly through the car window, causing him to immediately squeeze his eyes shut upon opening them with a small hiss of pain.

“It’s not that easy, Sapnap.”

“It’s not as hard as you’re making it, either! You just need to man up, George. Maybe stepping back a bit would help?”

“Man up? Don’t be insensitive, it’s not my fault he makes it so hard to—”

He vaguely tunes into the sound of hushed voices to his right, head still swimming in the space between consciousness and unconsciousness, doing his best to fully wake up and take in his surroundings.

The conversation is abruptly cut off by the sound of Sapnap shushing George when Dream lifts his head and accidentally hits Sapnap in the face mid-stretch.

“Morning, sleeping beauty. Did you have a nice beauty rest?”

Dream shoots a glare at Sapnap, still blinking the sleep out of his eyes, then he realizes he probably looks less intimidating and more like a confused barn owl.

“You’re one to talk. Where are we?” he says through a yawn.

“About halfway there. There’s a rest stop up ahead that we’re gonna stop at in a minute to take a short break,” Kay pipes up.

Craning his neck, Dream peers across his friends and out the window and sure enough, there’s a run-down building up ahead, standing tall amidst a tangle of overgrown weeds. His gaze strays to the side, landing where George is sitting, and to his surprise he sees George’s eyes already on him, watching him intently with an unreadable look on his face.

He looks away quickly, though, and Dream is left reeling once again.

As soon as they pull into the barren parking lot he’s scrambling to climb over stray limbs and out the door, relaxing and taking in a breath of fresh air once he’s on solid ground. Everyone else follows soon after, breaking off into their respective activities, and Dream feels George sidle up beside him, nudging his arm as he stretches the muscles that are taut with hours of inactivity.

“I’m hungry.”

Sighing, Dream drops his arms and straightens up. “Then go get food, George.”

“But I don’t know where food is,” George whines, tugging gently on Dream’s sleeve and looking up at him with a silent plea in his eyes.

“Go find a vending machine or something, I don’t know.”

“Come with me?”

Dream drags a hand down his face and rolls his eyes, trying to hide his fond smile. Wordlessly, he walks alongside George, keeping an eye out for a vending machine as they scout the perimeter of the building together.

Their efforts are fruitless, and they walk around with no luck until George starts to complain about

how much his feet hurt. They've passed the same dead lizard on the ground at least twelve times, and all of the broken, faded bricks on this goddamn building look exactly the same. At one point their hands brush together and George reaches out to grab his hand and squeeze it once before dropping it again, and Dream has to use a lot of mental energy to refrain from verbalizing his confusion in the form of what probably would've been a swear.

Finally, Dream spots a rusty, broken down vending machine hidden in a crevice and pulls out his wallet, attempting to flatten a dollar bill on the edge of the machine before feeding it in and tapping in the code for a bag of chips.

"It's a miracle vending machine," he jokes, and George offers nothing more than a light laugh as he takes the chips from Dream's outstretched hand.

They stay there for a moment, standing in silence, and Dream tips his head back, watching an eagle soar through the gloomy blue-grey sky and relishing in the peacefulness of the tree branches rustling in the wind.

"Dream?" George blurts out, avoiding eye contact when Dream turns to look down at him expectantly.

"Yeah?"

George kicks at the loose gravel beneath their feet, the air around him suddenly buzzing with nervousness. "Can we talk for a minute, please?"

The pit in Dream's stomach suddenly opens wider, threatening to swallow him, and he battles with himself to subdue it. It's probably nothing serious, and yet, he still finds himself running through every possible scenario in his head.

There's no way George could know about his feelings—

"Yeah, of course we can."

—but then again, the gentleness of his voice every time he speaks to him isn't doing much to hide it. He's irrationally terrified.

"I think we should—"

George's words are cut short by the sound of leaves crunching behind them, and they both whirl around to search for the source of the noise.

"Grandma says you guys have been gone for too long and we gotta go."

Liam is standing at the edge of the dirt path that leads up to the hole in the wall, his red sneakers freshly stained with what Dream hopes is mud, and he looks bored to death. He can't say he blames him.

Dream shoots an apologetic look at George before they follow Liam back to the car, but he only shrugs, as if to say *'it wasn't that big of a deal anyway.'*

The rest of the car ride is uneventful, filled with games of I Spy and punch buggy, with the majority of the car's occupants making unsuccessful attempts at sleeping. The sight of their destination, the stone house shaded by willow trees and vines, is more than welcoming and Dream all but races out of the car the second it crawls to a stop.

He shivers in the unexpectedly frigid breeze, suddenly wishing he'd worn a jacket as he rubs his hands up and down his arms in an attempt to conserve warmth.

"It's a lot colder than I thought it was gonna be."

Sapnap makes a face at him. "It's North Carolina, dumbass. Did you think it was gonna be warm?"

Truthfully, he had, foolishly, thought that it would be at least warmer than this. He isn't about to let Sapnap have that victory, though, so he mutters a simple "*no*" and leaves it at that, popping open the trunk and busying himself with digging around the bags for a sweater.

Finally, he finds an old worn-down sweatshirt and pulls it over his head, shrinking into the warm fabric. He hurries to join everyone else, who's already made their way down the stone path to the front door. He pushes through to stand next to George, catching his eye and offering him a warm smile.

He pretends not to notice the way that George takes a small step to the side, putting distance between them when Dream's arm presses against his. He pretends not to notice, because he can't be bothered to think about what it would mean if he did.

The door swings open before anyone gets a chance to knock on it, and they're greeted by cheerful faces lined with years of life and dusted with rosy cheerfulness.

"Hello! Come in, come in, we don't want anyone catching a cold, now, do we?" his grandma cries, escorting the group inside with excited waves of her hand.

Once inside, she greets everyone with individual hugs while Dream's grandpa stands to the side and watches with a small smile, hands in the pockets of his pants that are held up by suspenders covered in drawings of smiling candy canes.

He steps in when they've finished, saying his own hello's and giving a firm shake of George and Sapnap's hands.

"It's nice to meet you boys, I've heard a lot about you both," he says, stepping back with a friendly nod.

"How is everyone, oh, it feels like forever since we've seen each other!" his grandma says as she leads them into the living room, where a small box television is playing quietly in the corner, illuminating the floral couches in flickering white light.

Dream sits next to George on the antique loveseat he'd watched his grandma buy when he was a kid, vaguely remembering the way he had slept on it that night, adamant that it was comfortable enough and too stubborn to admit it when the springs dug into his back through the fabric. Those same springs shove their way into his back now as he pushes back against them in his carefulness to give George a decent amount of space.

"I heard it's supposed to start snowing soon," she continues on as she takes a seat on the couch next to Drista, busying herself with fussing over a stray strand of hair on her head.

"It'll be nice to have a snowy Christmas," Sofie muses absentmindedly, her voice slightly strained from the effort of trying to pull Liam onto her lap. Liam sticks his tongue out at her but relents giving up on trying to run through the house at her insistent whispers about how he's bound to break something.

Sapnap snorts. "Doesn't it snow here, like, every Christmas?"

“Must you always be like this? It does, I was just saying.” Sofie rolls her eyes and spares a lighthearted glare toward Sapnap, who dramatically throws a hand over his heart and scoffs.

“I’m actually the most chill person alive, Sofie. It’s not my fault you decided being Captain Obvious was your new career path.”

Now it’s Dream’s turn to let out a wheeze at that, giving up his position of listening in silently on the conversation in favor of joining them. “‘*Captain Obvious*’? What are you, 12?”

Sofie sports a smug smile while Sapnap frowns at Dream, opening his mouth to retort but closing it again when Dream’s grandpa steps in front of them, clapping his hands together and scanning the room with a bright smile.

“Speaking of Christmas,” he begins in an obvious attempt to dissolve the argument waiting to happen, “why doesn’t someone help me grab the tree off of y’all’s car and bring it in so we can decorate it?”

Sapnap and Dream both stand, offering to help, but Dream sits back down when his grandma protests, saying she wants him to introduce her to his “new boyfriend,” so Sapnap and his grandpa head out as Dream awkwardly stands up, offering a hand to George to pull him up with him.

“Oh, so you must be the George I’ve heard so much about!”

Dream cringes as his grandma begins fawning over them—*the new couple*—in true grandma fashion, pinching George’s cheek and chiding him on his lack of so much as a scarf or a hat. When she finally hobbles off to the kitchen to fetch a tin of gingersnaps she’d baked, George turns to Dream with a raised eyebrow and a smile.

“Do you talk to everyone in your family about me, or just some of them?”

Dream chokes on his intake of air, trying to play it off with a laugh as he pulls a face. “What can I say, George? You’re a popular topic of conversation around here. People just can’t get enough of you.”

George makes a sound that sounds like a half-laugh and half-scoff, and his retort dies on his tongue when Dream’s grandma walks back into the room, her face lit up brighter than the decorative reindeer lights sat atop the mantel.

She holds out the tin, the lid already off, and both boys gratefully accept a cookie. “I put special Christmas decorations on them; little green and red sprinkles, see?”

“They’re very nice. I think. I’m... colorblind,” George admits, and she lets out a hearty laugh, ringing out and filling the space with delightful warmth.

“Oh, well, that’s okay,” she smiles. “It’s the taste that counts.”

The conversation is interrupted by the sound of the front door reopening, and they move on as the tree is brought in and the towering boxes of decorations are brought out while Sapnap helps Dream screw the tree into the stand.

A wide grin splits across Dream’s face when Kay connects her phone to a bluetooth speaker she’d brought along with her, the tinkling beginning of Jingle Bells beginning to leak out of the speaker, and he flashes a mischievous smile at George. He holds a hand out to him and dips into an exaggerated bow, looking up at him through shaded lashes.

George rolls his eyes, pushing Dream's hand down and making a point of turning his back and putting all his focus into the box of ornaments in front of him, pulling out a cracked gingerbread man with a small frown and hanging him on a low branch as Dream shrugs off his unwillingness and moves on to Sapnap, who happily accepts his offer to dance to the music.

Three songs and an overabundance of embarrassing goofy dancing later, a quiet grunt of frustration catches Dream's attention. He stops his dramatic rendition of Deck the Halls to see George on his tiptoes, reaching toward the top of the tree with a glass hummingbird ornament in hand, his face scrunched in frustration.

Dream hesitates for a moment, unsure of whether he'd welcome his help or not, but ultimately decides it'd be easier to offer it. He taps George on the shoulder with a grin.

"Need some help there?"

George's head whips around to face him, a scowl adorning his face. "No. Maybe. I just can't reach this bit on the tree here, I'll figure it out."

"Aw, Georgie, you can't reach the top of the tree? It's not even that high up, look, I can literally touch it," he says, proving his point by reaching up with ease and flicking a branch at the very top of the tree.

George only deepens his scowl, but even now, hints of playfulness dance between the annoyed lines as he thrusts the ornament toward Dream.

"If you're so tall, why don't you do it yourself?"

"Maybe I will," Dream says, raising an eyebrow. He reaches out to take it, purposefully brushing his outstretched hand in a moment of bravery, testing the waters, and he basks in the light flush that blooms on the apples of George's cheeks.

George turns away, suddenly extremely interested in a particularly uninteresting pine needle, and Dream takes the opportunity to reach over him, pushing lightly against his back as he hooks the ornament onto a branch and watches George try to shrink impossibly further in on himself.

Dream leans closer, his head swimming, and he lets his arm linger as he brings it down to George's waist, bumping the tip of his nose into the back of George's head in a gesture that *bleeds* of his true intentions as he feels his shallow breaths skate across the nape of George's neck—

—And George ducks away.

"You could've just given me a ladder or something, dumbass," he mumbles into his hands, doing his best to hide away from Dream's piercing gaze.

Raising a teasing eyebrow, Dream leans back into George's space to ruffle his hair. "Oh, but this is so much more fun."

George's eyes snap up to meet Dream's. "Yeah, for you, maybe," he says, and although his voice lacks any real malice, the spark in his eyes is gone and the seriousness lacing his tone drowns out any attempt at a lighthearted joke.

Dream stops cold in his tracks, letting his hand hang limp in the air where it stood.

"For you, *maybe*."

The words George spoke carry the unmistakable implication that this isn't something he's enjoying. He doesn't find the same pleasure in the playful banter– the *flirting*– that Dream does, and suddenly, he feels stupid for blindly going along this whole trip without so much as talking to him about it.

At the sight of Dream's sudden state of shock, George softens with a small sigh. "I'm sorry," he says, simply, and he takes Dream's hand in his own, guiding it down gently from its resting place.

The sudden warmth envelops his knuckles, slipping between the cracks in his skin created by the biting air around them, and a fleeting thought leaves him thinking that perhaps this is what love feels like. Small touches, intertwined with undercurrents of genuine care that hang unspoken in the air, but it's enough.

It's enough because it has to be, but maybe it's more than that. Maybe it's enough to be content with the fleeting touches and awkward hugs that rarely go any further. Maybe that's what they're meant for.

George shifts Dream's hand in his own, curling his fingers around the back of his hand with a light brush of his thumb against his wrist. He tugs his hand and Dream stumbles after him, mumbling his agreement when George calls out to the others that they're going to go study, and he's starting to think that maybe he'd follow this dumbass to the end of the world, and all he'd have to do is ask.

It's fairly unsurprising when they end up playing Minecraft on their laptops instead of finishing their last project.

It's safe to say that Dream's spent more time watching George than he has working, observing the way he rests his cheek on his propped up knee when he gets tired and memorizing the way the Christmas lights that have been haphazardly strung along the ceiling cast dancing shadows across his face.

It's a miracle he can tear his eyes away long enough to look at his own computer.

"George, c'mere," he says, his avatar jumping up and down on the screen as he watches George run towards him.

"What? I was in the middle of gathering wood, if you're about to give me another one of your stupid flowers–"

Dream stops crouching next to George and looks down at the in-game ground, letting his head hang. "They aren't *stupid*, George. They're gestures of my love," he says, and throws a dandelion onto the ground.

"Your lo[-] whatever," George says with a scoff. He picks up the dandelion anyway. "You were supposed to be getting iron, you idiot. And I think dandelions are technically weeds, not flowers."

Taking the subtle rejection in stride, Dream is unphased as he simply moves a poppy to his hotbar and throws it at George.

"Okay, stop giving me flowers."

"No." A tulip.

"*Dream.*"

“What?” An allium.

“Seriously, Dream, stop it,” George says, and it comes out sharp, slicing through the air between them.

Dream finally holds his hands up in mock surrender, then frowns. “You’re being weird.”

Suddenly, he can actually feel George’s eyes boring into the back of his head and he has to resist the urge to fidget under the attention.

“Weird?”

“Well, I just mean, like, you’re kind of avoiding me.”

George lets out a small noise of confusion. “I’m not, I’ve been with you literally almost this entire trip.”

“Okay, well, maybe you’re not *avoiding* me, per se. I dunno. You just got kind of really reserved or something. Is everything okay?” Dream reiterates, allowing his leg to bounce up and down in an attempt to release at least some of the pent up energy that’s been winding up in his core as he waits patiently for George to gather his thoughts and provide an answer to the question that’s been plaguing him all day.

“Everything’s fine. We’re fine.”

Dream nods, trying to bring a sort of understanding to the situation despite the fact that he understands absolutely none of it. Silently, they fall back into their respective activities, the conversation seemingly over.

"Actually—" George says suddenly, then stops himself. A few beats pass. "Dream?"

Dream spins in his chair, turning to look at George. "Yeah?"

"You’ve been sort of different lately."

Dream's brow furrows in an attempt to recall the past few days, trying to remember what George could be talking about. "What do you mean?"

"I dunno, you just... you're more touchy than usual. Like, more than you are with Sapnap or anyone else," he explains haltingly, eyes on anything but Dream as he scratches the base of his neck.

George’s words *should* take the weight off of Dream’s chest; the light tone in which they’re spoken should be enough to relieve the tension that’s woven itself through every vulnerable crack and crevice of his being over the course of this helltrip. And yet, because nothing can be that easy, it inexplicably worsens the concern growing steadily in the back of his mind in a way that feels impossible to approach.

So he laughs.

"That's it? George, we're supposed to be dating. I'm just trying to make it seem believable. But if it makes you uncomfortable, I'll stop."

George looks down, his face flushing a deep red. "Oh, no, it's fine. Sorry, I just— I forgot about that for a second," he finishes with a strained laugh.

Dream wants to push, to at least ask if he was okay, let alone about the fact that he somehow forgot

the situation he'd gotten them into, but the look on George's face makes him think that might not be the best idea right now.

"Don't be sorry, I'll tone it down a little. It's not like couples constantly milk the relationship, anyway," he dismisses instead, giving George an out from the conversation and going back to placing stone in the crafting grid to make a furnace.

"No, really, it's fine. Maybe... maybe I like it, just a bit."

George's response is quiet, casual and light, but something about his tone is guarded. As if he's bracing himself for something; building up delicate walls around his words.

Dream wants to slam his head down onto the desk.

The apprehensive tugging and shoving of his heartstrings is infuriating, his *inability to read George* is infuriating, and the worst part is that he doesn't even mind all that much. He'd thought he would, initially been nervous when he'd realized what his feelings for George meant, but in moments like these he constantly finds himself torn between wanting to annihilate George's speaking privileges and hoping he never changes.

"Dream? Sorry, did I—"

"What? No, it's fine, I just—"

"Forget I said anything. That came out wrong, I just... I just meant that I don't hate it. Not like I, um..." George's words are rushed and he lets his sentence trail off, and Dream hates the way he allows himself to indulge in analyzing the undertones of the other's words; allows the faltering volume and the small strain in his voice to provide him with fleeting slivers of hope.

He hates it, because he can't go two minutes without projecting his own feelings onto anything his best friend does, and it's fucking embarrassing.

"I get it," he supplies weakly. Pausing for a moment, he debates continuing on, weighing his options carefully. "Can I ask you something?"

George gives a small hum. "Might as well."

Dream turns to face him once more, this time drawing his legs in closer to his body and sitting criss-cross on the creaking chair as he forces himself to maintain eye contact. It would be so easy to allow his eyes to roam once more, taking in every bit of George he can, but he wants to avoid pushing George further than he seems to allow.

"If you're okay with... all this," he starts, "why'd you start acting all weird about it?"

This time, he knows he isn't imagining the spark of panic that lights in George's face at the question. He can't be.

"I didn't."

And with that, George's walls have closed in on him again. He's back to being completely expressionless, and Dream is back at square one.

But as much as he wants to respect George's weird, vague, ever-changing boundaries, he's sick of taking two steps forward and one step back every time they talk. So, instead of letting it be, instead of waiting patiently for George to find some way to relieve his stress, he decides to do something.

He makes the decision when the incessant whirring of the fans finally pokes at the depths of his brain, striking the last unfreyed nerve, and he slams his laptop shut with a sigh.

“I think I’ve had enough for one day.”

George looks up at him quizzically as he crawls across the bed with a grin and closes George’s laptop as well. He moves behind him, playfully throwing his arms over his shoulders, and his eyebrows shoot up in pleasant surprise when George relaxes into his touch and leans back against his chest.

Dream smiles fondly down at him when he brings his hand up to mindlessly play with Dream’s fingers as he tilts his head back to look at him with a soft smile and a furrowed brow. Dream moves his free hand to George’s shoulder and traces anything that comes to mind, and he thinks he could do this forever. Never get tired of the way George’s eyes see through him every time their gazes connect, never get tired of the freckles sparsely dotted across his cheeks in what couldn’t be described as anything but a beautiful contrast against the pale expanse of his skin.

If staying ‘*just friends*’ with George for the rest of his life meant that he could have this, he’d do it a thousand times over and never ask for more.

Chapter End Notes

dream, you poor sweet thing. you don't have a thought behind those eyes

When in Doubt, Mario Kart

Chapter Notes

posting this at buttfuck in the morning because im not gonna have internet for a while
lord have mercy

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So, what’s up with the lights all over their yard?”

George speaks idly as he walks along the narrow road, covered in a fine powder from the light snowfall that morning. Dream lifts his head at the question, burying his hands deeper into the pockets of his sweatpants as he silently curses himself for not wearing more layers.

George is looking at him expectantly, so Dream turns to the direction he’d been looking before and sees the neighbor’s yard, boxes strewn messily across the frost-tipped grass with strings of Christmas lights hanging over the edges.

A low chuckle bubbles up from his throat. “Another elderly couple lives there. They’re friends with my grandparents, and they kinda go all out every year with their light display. It gets pretty messy when they set up, but it looks cool as hell when it’s finished.”

George gives a small hum of acknowledgement. After a moment of silence that seems to stretch on longer than it truly does, he says, “I’d like it if you’d take me to see them when they’re lit up. If you want.”

Dream’s stomach does somersaults at the thought of taking George out, watching as the glow of the colorful lights casts rainbow hues that dance along his face, being able to bring a wide smile to his face that shines impossibly bright even in the dark of night.

It’s not self-indulgent if he wants it too, he convinces himself.

“Course I will, George. I’d–”

–do anything you asked, just to see you happy.

He quietly clears his throat. “I’d be happy to.”

“Would it be, like–”

George stops himself short, pausing for an almost imperceptible moment as a look of shock passes over his face and disappears as quickly as it came. He gives a minute shake of his head, as if shaking something loose, and an awkward laugh escapes his mouth at the puzzled look Dream directs at him.

“Would it be like what?”

“No, no. I didn’t– that just kind of slipped out, I’m not sure where I was going with that,” George dismisses, waving a hand, and Dream knows not to push any further.

The conversation seemingly over, silence envelops them once again. Something unspoken always seems to hang suspended in the air between them, now. It's as if every conversation they hold teeters dangerously on a wire, balancing between a veiled fear and something deeper, something more destructive.

And perhaps George is right, in all his cautiousness and indulgent reluctance; maybe it's better to bask in the limbo between the unknown and fulfillment rather than risk ruining something with the currents that flow beneath the surface.

And so Dream sets his focus aside and stills his mind for just a moment, searching for peace in the barren branches that hang over the road, guiding them out of what's left of scarcely scattered houses and pulling them to wander just along the edge of a field. But of course the peace is short lived, and his attention is inevitably drawn back to George, who inches closer with every passing minute.

He watches as George bundles deeper into the heavy blanket wrapped around his shoulders when a particularly bitter gust of wind that whips around them, rocking the trees behind them and rustling the remaining leaves as if they're musical instruments played only by the cruel gods of the winds and weather.

He'd insisted on bringing the blanket, attempting to pull a second one from the closet for Dream with insurances about how he'd get cold, but he'd stubbornly refused.

Of course, he *does* get cold. A chilled shiver racks his body, and George catches it. Dream expects him to poke fun at it, say "*I told you so,*" but it doesn't come.

Instead, he silently throws one end of the blanket around Dream's shoulders, and when he receives nothing but a startled look in response, he smiles and pulls the blanket tighter around them both.

He brings Dream to a stop with him at a fence post that sits, lonely, at the place where the field meets the path, and carefully pulls him down to sit. They settle atop the powdery grass that's rustled by the breeze, and George's head falls on Dream's shoulder, warm and heavy against the frigid air.

"Dream?" he murmurs.

"George?"

A soft smile adorns George's face, and his eyes flutter closed. "Can I ask you a question?"

Dream mimics his smile as he gazes down at him, not bothering to hide the way his eyes rake over his delicate facial features. "Ask away."

"Do you always mean the things that you say?" he asks, nervously knocking their knees together beneath the blanket swamping them both.

Dream tilts his head, confusion ghosting over his face. "Usually, yeah. Most of the time. Why? Do you think I don't?"

"No, it's not that," George reassures him, readjusting his head. The top of his hair burrows deep into the crook of Dream's neck, and he shudders. "I was more wondering how you do that."

"How I... mean the things I say?"

"Say the things you mean, but yeah."

Dream falls silent, contemplating the question. He's known George for years, known how he struggles with communication— something that's always come easily to him. How do you put that into words, for someone who doesn't understand?

"I'm not really sure," he admits. Absently, he picks short blades of grass from the patches untouched by the snow around them and places them on George's knee. "I think I just say the first thing that comes to mind, instead of letting the words stew in my thoughts and getting worried about what they mean."

George's nose wrinkles. "Aren't you scared you'll let something slip by accident?"

"Not really," Dream says, shrugging only with his unoccupied shoulder. "If I let something slip, it was for a reason. I have no reason to hide what I'm thinking."

He feels George's head drag against his shoulder and realizes he's nodding, to the best of his ability. He lets out a breathy laugh and brushes the grass off of his knee, only to put more in its place.

"What are you thinking right now?"

George speaks softly, words flowing freely as he rests against Dream's side. Dream tries to ignore the way his heart stutters and aches at every movement he makes, he really does, but it feels as impossible as the vain efforts of a man trying to count every snowflake that falls from the sky— and for the first time, he fears the words that may come out of his mouth.

A deep breath.

"What is this, between us? Like, exactly?"

A long pause.

An *excruciatingly* long pause, and Dream is afraid he's fucked up.

"I'm... not sure what you mean."

Dream opens his mouth to respond, but is silenced by George, who slips out from underneath the blanket and stands above him. He offers down a hand, and this time his face is wary, almost apologetic.

With a sigh, Dream accepts the outstretched hand, using it as an anchor to pull himself up, and finds himself barely an inch away from George.

Their faces are close enough for their breaths to intermingle, George's slow and deliberate, Dream's quick to match the pace of his beating heart. His eyes slip down, almost involuntarily, to George's lips, and they rest there. It would be so easy, *too* easy, to reach down, to close the gap, to pull him forward once again and capture him in a kiss more loving than their first.

But he doesn't, of course he doesn't. It would ruin too much.

"Dream, stop."

Dream's eyes snap back up to meet George's, furrowing his brow. "Stop what?"

"That. Thinking. Whatever you're thinking, stop it, I can feel it from here. Stop stressing yourself out," George demands, his face melting into a more caring expression.

He gives Dream no chance to argue, no chance to blurt out that *he's* the thing stressing him out, as he grabs the edges of the blanket that's now pooled around Dream's shoulders and pulls him down. He presses a light kiss to his temple, then holds him steady with a hand at the back of his neck as he moves down to do the same to his cheek, and it robs Dream of every last bit of air he had left.

"Hey, you're okay, right?" he asks, pulling away but not bothering to remove his hand.

"Yeah," Dream says, still trying desperately to even out his breath. "Yeah, I'm good."

George nods, but he looks unconvinced, and Dream softens impossibly more under his gaze.

"I'm just tired, the trip's been kind of a lot" he assures him, and moves a hand down to grip his waist in a gesture he worries bleeds too deeply of his true feelings.

George frowns. "Oh, well, I can sleep on the couch tonight if you want some space. It might help you get some rest."

"No, no, it's fine," Dream says hurriedly. "The couch is already taken by someone else anyway, so."

"Well, that's fine, I'll just sleep on the floor, then."

He squeezes the hand that rests on George's waist with a sense of finality. "George. You're sleeping with me."

George stifles a laugh, raising an amused eyebrow at Dream's choice of words. "I'm sleeping with you?"

Dream loosens his grip once again, snickering softly.

"Maybe I'd like that." Maybe he should just shut up.

George's face goes blank for a fleeting moment, bordering on the edge of surprise. "Oh," he breathes out, and his hand falls with his face as his expressions become indecipherable once again.

A snowflake settles on the tip of his nose, and Dream stares down at it, its intricate patterns and melting edges, until George gently removes the hand from his waist and gathers a fistful of the blanket in his hand. "We should probably get going, it's starting to snow," he says, voice barely above a whisper.

He gives it a small tug and Dream immediately falls into step behind him, letting himself be pulled along back down the beaten path at a rapidly increasing speed as the snowfall becomes heavier and heavier. By the time it's falling steadily, they've broken into a run, all breathy laughs and rosy cheeks as they finally stumble through the doorway of the house.

George gives Dream one final smile before dropping the blanket from his grip, excusing himself to take a shower. Dream watches as he disappears down the hallway, eyes trailing after him until he's gone.

With a frustrated sigh, he shrugs the blanket off of his shoulders and drops it onto the couch, making a mental note to toss it in the dryer later. He lingers for a moment, eyeing the couch, and he's considering collapsing onto it and letting sleep take him when he hears a loud "hey" from behind him.

He jumps, and whirls around to see Sapnap standing at the edge of the hall, using the corner as a

support beam as he leans against it. “What the fuck, Sapnap, you scared me,” he hisses, earning a quiet laugh from the other.

“Sorry, sorry. Did you and loverboy have a good time out there?”

Dream makes a face at him and drops down onto the couch. “Loverboy? You’re such an idiot. You know we aren’t actually together, Sap.”

“True, true, I’m just messing with you, man,” Sapnap says, and moves further into the room. He stuffs his hands into the pockets of his shorts. How he can wear shorts in weather like this, Dream has no clue. Subconsciously, he burrows deeper in on himself, absently wondering whether the thermostat has been turned up. Probably not.

Sapnap clears his throat to catch Dream’s attention. “Uh, but seriously, dude. Can we talk for a sec?”

“Sure?”

Nodding, Sapnap settles onto the couch next to Dream, leaning his elbows on his knees and tilting his head to look at him. “It’s about George,” he clarifies.

Dream’s eyes go wide for a split second. “No,” he says, praying he’ll leave it alone, *knowing* what’s about to come.

“Oh, my God. Dream, you can’t just avoid this. Are you seriously gonna avoid this?”

“Avoid what?”

“Dream. George isn’t your boyfriend,” Sapnap says, exasperated.

“I’m... aware?” he drawls, unsure of where this is going.

“But do you want him to be?”

Sapnap says it simply, spelling it out with no hesitation, and Dream blanches under the blatancy. He lets out a slow breath, contemplating, and scoots closer into Sapnap’s side.

“I don’t know. I like him, Sap, a lot,” he confesses, leaning against his shoulder despite the unnatural strain it puts on his back.

Sapnap wraps an arm around his shoulders and squeezes his arm with a small smile. “How long?” he asks, and his voice carries a gentle tone reserved only for the serious moments sparsely peppered throughout their friendship.

“Honestly? I realized it, like, a couple days ago, but I really don’t think that’s when it started.”

He huffs. “No shit, dude. Do you think it’s been like this for a while?”

Dream hesitates, thinking back on moments spent with George long before winter break. Movie marathons in the dead of night, quiet giggles and soft shushes that made his heart beat a little faster. Studying together in the library, desperately cramming for finals, his breath shaking when George grew tired and leaned against him for support.

“I think it might’ve been like this since we met,” he finally says.

Sapnap raises his eyebrows. “That long, huh? That’s pretty big.”

“It is,” he agrees. He draws his legs in closer and Sapnap hums, rubbing comforting lines across his shoulder. “I guess it should be more of a heavy realization or whatever, but it doesn’t feel that bad. I mean, it sucks, but it doesn’t feel like some big surprising moment.”

“I don’t think it’s supposed to be. You guys have been close for years, it must’ve been a gradual change.”

“Yeah, well, I mean, obviously there’s a reason it happened like this. You’re right. It just feels— it felt right.”

Sapnap glances at him, confusion etched into his face. “Felt?”

“It just feels kind of off now,” he mutters, shrugging. “It felt fine until it started actually affecting shit. I know George was the one who suggested this whole thing in the first place, and I agreed to it, but come on. Neither of us knew what to expect. And now it just— it just feels off.”

“Off?” Sapnap prompts him further.

“Like neither of us really know what we’re doing, or *I* don’t know what *I’m* doing and he knows too much, and he’s not doing all that well with it. I just don’t want to push him far enough to fuck up our friendship.”

“Dude, you’ve literally, like, made out with him in public,” Sapnap points out, drawing a halfhearted laugh from Dream.

“Shut up, dumbass, that was different,” he chuckles, and directs a weak punch at Sapnap’s leg, earning an annoyed “ow.”

Sapnap falls quiet for a minute, eyes trained on the coffee table in front of them. “Have you at all considered the possibility that he likes you back?”

Truthfully, he has. There have been instances where it was all he could think about, times when he sat alone, *hoping* beyond a sliver of a doubt that George feels the same pull to him that he feels, until reality settled back in. But there’s a difference between hope and observation.

“Well, yeah, I’ve considered it. But it’s just not realistic, you know?”

“Oh, my—” Sapnap rolls his eyes. “Maybe, just *maybe*, he’s not unhappy about the fake relationship. Maybe he’s just unhappy it’s for show— like, he doesn’t want it to be fake, or something.”

Dream frowns. “Sap, I know you’re trying to help, but don’t you think it’s kind of shitty to suggest something that’s so far from the truth?”

Sapnap stares blankly at him for a moment, then moves his arm from around his shoulders. He brings his other hand up and grips both of Dream’s shoulders, giving him a light shake.

“Dream, you know I love you, and I mean this in the nicest possible way, but you are the dumbest fucking person I have ever met.”

“What— no I’m *not*,” Dream says incredulously, shrugging his hands off and scrunching his face. “I know what I’m talking about. I was— I almost kissed him, Sapnap. In private. And I know he knew what I was doing and he just got all weird again and changed the subject. I don’t want that.”

“Well, what do you want?”

“I want—” he pauses. He wants him to be loved, he wants him to be happy, he wants him to be *his*. “I want him. In any way that I can have him.”

Pursing his lips, Sapnap pushes himself up to stand at the end of the couch. “I’m proud of you for figuring that out, but figure the rest of your shit out now, man. And for fuck’s sake, spend more time with me, I’ve barely even seen you this entire time,” he jokes.

A sheepish smile creeps across Dream’s face. “You’re right, I’m sorry. I will. We can hang right now, if you want? I brought my Switch with me, we could hook it up to the TV.”

“Okay, well maybe not *right* now, I offered to help your grandpa finish the light display. Spend more time with me starting tomorrow.”

Dream grins, and reaches out to clasp Sapnap’s hand in his own, using it to pull himself up, then to pull him into a short hug. After a firm pat on the back they pull apart, and Dream says, “I will. Promise. And thank you, I really appreciate it.”

He doesn’t have to clarify what “it” is, he knows that Sapnap understands. They part with one more smile, Sapnap throwing a small wave over his shoulder as he opens the front door, and Dream makes his way to the room he’s staying in with a newfound sense of calmness.

Calmness that absolutely dissipates when he sees George standing in the middle of the room, just finishing pulling on a fresh shirt, his hair wet and hanging in loose curls along his forehead.

“You look good,” he blurts out, and George whirls around at the sound of his voice, a bashful smile quickly replacing the startled look on his face.

“Um, thanks?”

“I meant your hair. It looks good like that. Better. You should do it more often.” God, could that have been more awkward?

George scoffs. “It’s just wet, dumbass.”

“Yeah, but it’s cute,” Dream says, shrugging.

Eyeing him warily, George crosses his arms, pulling his sleeves down over his hands. “I’ll consider it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, sure, if you stop trying to get in my pants every two seconds.”

He says it as a joke, moving on easily to a new subject with a light laugh, and Dream tries to take it as such, but cruel whispers in the back of his mind tell him it was more than that. He plays it off with a laugh as well, batting away the thoughts as quickly as they come.

“What were you and Sapnap talking about? I heard you guys on my way back to the room.”

“Uh,” Dream responds, eloquently. “Mario Kart.”

George raises an eyebrow. “You were talking about... Mario Kart?”

“Yeah, we’re, uh. We’re thinking about having a game night once we’re back at the dorms, since we haven’t done one in a while. He wanted to have a Mario Kart tournament,” Dream coughs.

“Oh, that could be fun,” George says, his face lighting up. “I like Mario Kart.”

“We can be on the same team, it’ll be cool.”

“Oh, hell yeah, we’ll kick Karl and Sapnap’s asses.” George grins as he settles onto the bed, pulling his phone from the nightstand as he speaks. “C’mere, I wanna show you a TikTok I found earlier.”

It’s easy to forget that not only is George the object of Dream’s affection, but he’s also his best friend, and he’s equally as much of an idiot as he is a confusing problem that tugs on his heartstrings. And it’s moments like this that make him remember that the person he’s fallen for is his closest friend; the same person that sends him stupid TikToks at three in the morning when he knows he’s awake to see them.

As they sit together on the bed, heads hanging over each other’s shoulders to be able to see their phone screens as they scroll, he can’t keep the fond smile off of his face, because no matter what, no matter how either of them feel, George will always be George, and he’ll always be here, right next to him.

Chapter End Notes

recently ive taken up fnaf vr as a hobby. i think it's fried my brain but it's okay because i feel more connected to the morons in this story now. dream i get it i really do

Stores in Rural Areas Suck

Chapter Notes

sapnap chapter my beloved <3

also, if you'd like to know when i'm going to be painfully late with an update go ahead and follow my [twitter](#) [: i am as annoying as possible but you'll get a heads up when i've done something stupid & had to delay writing

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Hey, Sap, do you wanna make a quick store run with me?”

Dream stands awkwardly in the doorway of the guest room, spinning his keychain around his finger as he looks at Sapnap expectantly.

Sapnap pulls his headphones off and pauses what he'd been doing on his laptop. “Uh, sure? What do you need to go to the store for?”

“Food,” Dream says, shrugging.

Sapnap huffs and rolls his eyes. “What *kind* of food, dumbass?”

“*Food* food. I don't know. Kay gave me a list, I was just asking if you wanna come with.”

“A list for what?” Sapnap pushes, glancing down at his laptop as he presumably closes out of what he'd previously been doing and diverts his full attention back to Dream.

“What? Oh, I offered to make Christmas Eve dinner, we just need to buy a few things.”

“Why didn't you just start with that? Actually, no, don't answer that, I don't care,” Sapnap says, shuffling around on the bed. “Why am I going?”

Dream makes a face at him and shifts his weight so that he's leaning against the doorframe. “What do you mean, *why are you going?*”

“Why am *I* going?” Sapnap repeats, like it's some obvious answer sitting directly in front of Dream's face. Which it's not, and Dream tries to let him know that by giving him the most confused look he can muster up. It seems to work, because Sapnap rolls his eyes and continues on. “Why not, like, George or something? Why am I the one who has to get up and go to the store with you?”

“You don't *have* to,” Dream says incredulously.

“Well then why, pray tell, are you asking me, Dream.”

Dream crosses his arms, taking on a defensive stance. “Am I not allowed to want to spend quality time with my best friend?”

“Quality time at a grocery store in the middle of nowhere?” Sapnap asks blankly.

“My *point* is, I said I’d spend more time with you,” Dream says, jingling the keys impatiently in his hand. “My offer still stands.”

Sapnap studies him for a moment, and a shit eating grin spreads across his face as he raises an eyebrow. “This is about what Sofie said earlier, isn’t it,” he says, as more of a statement than a question.

And, of course, he’s right, but he doesn’t need to know that. That man is nowhere *near* in need of an ego boost.

“No,” he lies, and Sapnap’s look of disbelief pierces right through him. With a drawn out sigh, he moves into the room and flops down onto a chair in the corner. “Okay, yeah, it fucking is. Me and George are not *glued at the hip*, what does that even mean.”

“George and I,” Sapnap corrects, and blanches under the piercing glare thrown his way. “Sorry. She was right, though. You kind of are.”

Dream throws his hands up in the air, slouching in his seat and groaning even though he knows fully well that they’re right. He’s barely left George’s side the entire trip, finding any and every excuse to be close to him, but can they blame him? No, they can’t, and he will stubbornly sit on his goddamn high horse until they pry his cold, dead body from it.

“Oh, my God, not you too. I’ve lost everything. Abandoned even by my closest friend. You wound me, Sap,” he cries, frowning at the man sitting on the bed in front of him as he shakes his head with a smile.

“Okay, okay, no need to be a drama queen. How about I’ll be your alibi if you buy me White Claw?”

“You don’t need White Claw.”

“Mountain Dew, then.”

Narrowing his eyes, Dream stares for a moment, then straightens up and shrugs. “Deal,” he says nonchalantly, and makes his way out of the room, tossing his keys up and down and wincing at the loud metal clang of keys hitting one another that sounds loudly through the otherwise quiet hallway.

Just as he’s pocketing the keys, hand on the front door knob and about to leave, he catches George’s eye. George is sprawled across the couch, socked feet hung over the armrest as he tries and fails to follow the drama flickering across the old TV in the corner.

He looks cute like that, Dream thinks.

Then again, Dream thinks George looks cute doing anything and everything.

“Where are you guys going?” George asks, brow furrowing as he speaks through lingering sleepiness that drifts through his voice in the form of a gentle rasp.

“Uh, just the store,” Dream replies, praying that George doesn’t pick up on the faint flush burning his ears. He doesn’t, thankfully, but Sapnap does, and he snickers lightly and flicks Dream on the shoulder, earning an annoyed glance.

George perks up, eyes brightening at the mention of leaving the house. “I’ll go with you guys.”

“No, man, sorry. It’s just us this time,” Sapnap tells him, apologetically.

“What the hell? Why?”

Sofie pops up from behind George on the couch, butting into the conversation, much to Dream’s disdain. “Yeah, Dream, what the hell?” she counters, grinning. “Bring your boyfriend with you.”

“Yeah, Dream, *bring your boyfriend with you*,” George repeats, flailing dramatically as he speaks.

With a light chuckle, Dream taps his chin, pretending to think intently about his answer. “Mm, no, I don’t think I will.”

“Whatever. I’m breaking up with you,” George grumbles as he slouches back into his spot on the couch.

Laughing, Dream ignores the dramatic “*ooh*” from Sofie and pulls the front door open. “You wouldn’t,” he chuckles, holding the door for Sapnap as he steps onto the porch.

“I would, and you suck. I’m *bored*.”

“You’ll get over it. Bye, George,” he calls over his shoulder as he pulls the door shut.

He walks shoulder to shoulder with Sapnap on the way to the car, and immediately hits the button to turn on the heat once they’ve got in. His phone, which he’d tossed halfheartedly onto the center console upon sitting down, begins buzzing incessantly once he’s pulled out of the driveway and onto the main road. He sees George’s contact name out of the corner of his eye and switches his attention rapidly between the road and the phone, trying his best to read them without crashing the car.

“Dream!” Sapnap shrieks, and Dream flinches as the sudden volume, hands tightening on the wheel. “Watch the fucking *road*, dude. I refuse to die because your headass can’t go two seconds without talking to your– George.”

“My George?” Dream teases.

Sapnap reaches over to slap his shoulder. “Fuck off. I tried to say two things at once and it didn’t work. Like you’ve never done that before,” he mumbles.

“I haven’t, actually. Because I’m perfect. I’m basically God, haven’t you heard?” Dream jokes, and haltingly stifles a wheeze when Sapnap pulls a sour face at him.

“Right, and I’m the Queen of England. Just drive the freaking car.”

The remainder of the drive is the same, filled with quips and retorts that bleed out into the parking lot as they run from the car to the doors of the supermarket, desperate to conserve as much heat as possible. The employee working the register gives them an odd look when they stumble through the doors, and Sapnap offers a sheepish smile, shrugging it off with a simple “*it’s really cold out there, homie*.”

Their shoes squeak against the linoleum floor, the sound bouncing off the walls and echoing through the barren store as they pass a shopping cart between themselves, neither wanting to push it. Eventually, Dream ends up hunched over the cart, grumbling as he follows Sapnap through the aisles in search of everything on their list.

Five minutes in, while Sapnap is searching the shelves, he caves and fishes his phone from his

hoodie pocket. He turns it on and is immediately greeted by a slew of messages from George, filling his lockscreen and drawing a small smile from his lips. Unlocking it, he sees that the last message sent was *“you’re so annoying literally pick up the phone I don’t deserve to be abandoned like this,”* and he scoffs as he types out a response.

“Sorry George. Guess I’ll just have to make it up to you?”

His phone buzzes almost immediately.

“Depends on what you have in mind.”

He chokes on air, desperately wondering when their flirting had begun to bleed into private conversations, and quickly tries to cover it up with a cough into the back of his hand.

“Hey, Dream, do you see any shells? I can’t find them.”

Dream snaps his head up to look at Sapnap, whose attention is still on the shelf in front of him. After a few seconds of looking, he grabs a box of pasta off the shelf and tosses it into the cart.

Sapnap makes a small noise of disapproval. “Those are regular shells. We need, like, jumbo shells.”

“Oh, sorry,” Dream mumbles, already back to hanging his head over his phone as he halfheartedly listens to Sapnap’s annoyed rambling.

“Depends on what you want,” he types. Somewhere between watching the typing bubble pop up and disappear multiple times, he realizes Sapnap’s gone silent and looks up to see him staring blankly in his direction.

“What?” he asks, glancing briefly to the side and back with a mirroring look.

“What do you mean, *what*?” Sapnap groans. “This is a team effort, Dream. Feel free to join me at any time.”

“Okay,” he says, shrugging, and goes back to anxiously watching the moving dots until the phone is pulled from his hands. “Hey, what—”

“This,” Sapnap says with a pointed look, “is mine now. ‘Any time’ means now. Help me *now*, Dream.”

Offering up a sheepish smile, Dream laughs. “Right, yeah, sorry. Helping now.”

After an additional two minutes of scouring the shelves in front of them, moving boxes of pasta around and peering behind the rows, it becomes increasingly obvious that they aren’t going to find what they need here.

“Well, shit,” Dream says, scratching the back of his neck and pushing himself up from where he’d been crouching.

“Yeah. Shit. Wait, hey, what about manicotti? That’s, like, stuffable, right?”

Dream nods and scans the shelf once more. “Yeah, why, do they have those?”

“Np, Dream,” Sapnap deadpans. “I only said that because I *don’t* see manicotti anywhere, and I just wanted to make this even more frustrating for the both of us.”

He grabs a box from the shelf, of what Dream assumes is manicotti, and tosses it into the cart before grabbing the box of shells Dream had thrown in earlier and replacing them. Satisfied, he holds Dream's phone back out to him, grinning as the screen lights up.

"Looks like you and loverboy got caught," he laughs.

Frowning, Dream snatches the phone from his outstretched hand to read the three consecutive messages sitting in his notifications.

"Depends on what you're willing to give me."

"Wait fuck Sofie is reading our texts."

"Dream she's literally trying to scroll through them now. This is your fault."

Snorting, Dream unlocks his phone. *"How is this my fault?"* he sends. Then, on a second thought, he adds, *"is she still reading?"*

The response comes quickly. *"Yes."*

He grins, an idea coming to mind that he'll more likely than not immediately regret. *"Aw :(so that means I can't tell you what I'm willing to do with you anymore?"*

"What the actual fuck did you just say to me, oh my God. Ew, she just read that. Freak."

"Oh, come on, Georgie, you don't mean that," he taps out, blindly following behind Sapnap with the cart and narrowly avoiding running him over multiple times.

"Dream, for the love of God, please pay attention to what you're doing."

"I am," he defends.

"You're paying attention to the *wrong thing*," Sapnap says, growing visibly exasperated.

Relenting, Dream looks up at him with an apologetic smile. "Okay, okay, I'm sorry. Really. Just let me finish, like, this *one* conversation and you'll have my full attention."

"I don't even want your attention at this point," Sapnap grumbles, but slows and falls into step right next to Dream anyway, leaning into his shoulder.

"Shut up literally shut up you're literally disgusting. You actually scared her off," George's newest text reads.

Sapnap snickers at that, hanging his head over Dream's shoulder to read the exchange. "You guys are gross, you're done," he says, making a face at him.

"Fine, whatever," Dream says, bumping his shoulder and almost driving him into a rack of hot sauce in the process.

"At least you guys are having fun, I guess," Sapnap mutters, reading the shopping list clenched in his hand and looking around for aisle signs.

"Yeah," Dream agrees. "I think— I was actually thinking about telling him. Like, just being honest about everything."

Sapnap stops short, skidding to a stop so quickly his shoes squeak against the floor and he knocks

over a display of chip bags. “*What?* Really?”

A wheeze escapes Dream as he bends over to help clean the mess. “Yes, really.”

“Are you for real? That’s great, dude,” he says, lowering his volume with another apologetic glance at the employee watching them tiredly from the front counter as they scoop up the display and replace it to the best of their ability. “Can I ask what made you want... that? I thought you were all worried about it.”

Shrugging, Dream finishes tossing the last bag onto the cardboard display. “I dunno. I just figured it probably won’t be as bad as I’m working it up to be. We’ve been friends for years, so even if I get rejected, it won’t really change anything, you know?”

Sapnap opens his mouth to respond, but gets distracted by a set of refrigerators to their left. He lurches forward and grabs a tub of ricotta cheese, tossing it carelessly into their cart before throwing the list into a small trash can at the end of an aisle.

“Last thing on the list,” he explains, and gives Dream a small nudge to guide him toward the checkout counter, eager to leave. “Anyway, that’s awesome, glad you figured shit out. Good for you.”

“Thanks, Sap,” Dream says with a smile, and Sapnap claps him on the back as he moves their groceries from the cart to the conveyor belt.

“Yeah, no problem, now go grab me my Mountain Dew while I finish this up.”

—

“Oh, thank God you’re back,” Sofie calls out the second they’ve stepped through the door. “Dream, your boyfriend is annoying.”

Dream watches, raising an eyebrow as George shoots a warning look at her, aiming a weak kick at her ankle. “I know,” he says, smiling when he becomes the target of George’s, albeit justified, annoyance.

“No, no, I’m being dead serious,” she laughs. “He was all boring and mopey and then he finally perked up for like ten minutes while he was texting you, and then he just went right back to taking up the whole couch and complaining.”

George scoffs. “I was not complaining.”

“Aw, you missed me?” Dream coos, enjoying the way the light pink tint dusting George’s cheeks betrays his annoyed scowl. “That’s adorable, babe.”

Immediately, he realizes what he just said and his eyes go wide; he hadn’t meant to let the last word slip. He holds his breath, praying that George either doesn’t notice or doesn’t care, but of course he *does*.

George’s mouth falls open and he scrunches his nose. “Actually, I think I preferred it when you were gone, *babe*,” he says, voice dripping with mockery.

He’s trying his hardest to look annoyed, but once again, the angry flush fighting its way up his neck gives him away, and Dream has to stifle a laugh in the fabric of his sleeve.

“You don’t mean that,” he chuckles, reaching a hand out to ruffle George’s hair before it’s batted

away.

"I do," George insists. "You suck, you're the worst."

Smiling, Dream leans down to bump the tip of his nose to the crown of George's head. "Does that mean you don't want to help me cook dinner?"

"Mm, yeah," George hums, pressing into the touch and sending gentle flutters through Dream's body and into his stomach.

"Ew," Sofie says, standing up off the couch with a groan. "I'm leaving before this turns into a PDA session."

"Wait, wait, take me with you, don't leave me with them," Sappnap says hurriedly, stumbling after her and down the hall, leaving the other two alone in the living room.

"So," Dream starts, drawing out the o for far longer than he probably should.

George gives him an odd look and lets out a quiet laugh. "So," he repeats.

For the first time, Dream is completely lost on ideas of what to say, words somehow managing to completely fail him, and briefly, he considers plopping down next to George and telling him everything. *Everything*, everything.

But, confessing in a moment of discomfort isn't exactly the most alluring concept, so he does the next best thing. Falls on classic tactics, ones that he's utilized for years without fail.

"George, you're still blushing, do you really like pet names that much?" he teases.

George snorts and shakes his head. "You wish."

"Yeah."

"What?"

Every word dries up on the tip of Dream's tongue at the realization that he had said that out loud, and George had definitely heard, and all he can manage to say back is—

"What?"

But George just shrugs and says, "Oh, nevermind, I just thought you said something," and Dream closes his eyes and lets out a breath, relieved.

"No, nothing," he says, and taps George twice on the shoulder. "C'mere, though, we do actually have to cook."

He manages to get George into the kitchen with little protest, and the two get to work, dropping the grocery bag onto the counter and pulling out what they need.

"So, what are we making, anyway?" George asks as he gingerly unwraps the chicken, steering clear of actually touching it in any way.

Dream scoffs, reaching over to grab George's wrist as he speaks. "Manicotti and chicken casserole. You have to actually *touch* the chicken to cut it, George," he says, pushing his hand down to emphasize his point.

“Wait, ew,” George complains, snatching his hand back and wiping it on his shirt. He stills for a moment, considering, then huffs out a sigh and relents. “Where are the knives?”

Dream hesitates for a brief second, then ventures over to pull a carving knife from the block sitting in the back corner of the counters. “Hang on, I don’t know if I really trust you with a—” he starts, and George cuts him off, reaching out to take it from his hand.

“I’ll be fine,” he scowls, and starts working on the chicken, albeit reluctantly.

“Well, I’m more worried about me than you, but,” Dream chuckles, earning yet another annoyed huff from George. “Sorry, sorry. Are you sure you can do that? I can do it if you want.”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Are you sure, because George, you just aren’t really the best at—”

Groaning, George turns to face him. “Choose your next words very carefully, I am holding a knife.”

“Jeez, okay,” Dream quickly backtracks, taking a step backward and eyeing the knife warily. “I was kidding, you’re a wonderful chef and I love your cooking very much.”

George scoffs, a small smile playing at the corner of his lips, and points the knife at Dream for emphasis as he speaks. “You’re a liar. But thanks.” The last part comes out quieter, more reserved, and Dream barely catches the change in tone, but it’s *there*.

It’s there, and he wonders what it meant, if it even meant anything, but it’s not enough to quell the concern spiking in his chest at the sharp tip pointed at him. He raises his hands placatingly, tilting his head.

“Don’t swing knives around, George, you aren’t *that* good.”

“I’ll swing my knife if I want to,” George retorts, waving it around wildly in front of him with a shit eating grin. Dream just sighs, bringing his hand up to grab his arm and lower it between them.

“Well, you won’t with me here,” he says firmly.

George shrugs, turning his attention back to chopping the chicken into thin strips. “I’m okay with accidentally stabbing you. You’ll live, probably.”

Wheezing, Dream drops his hand in favor of pounding it against the smooth marble of the counter as he laughs, the loud *thump* sending a startled jolt through George and elicits a string of annoyed mumbling while Dream composes himself. “You’re such an idiot. Who’d help you cook if I got stabbed?”

“Oh, you’re helping? I couldn’t tell.”

Dream just chuckles, wrapping his arms around George’s waist from behind and plopping his chin onto his shoulder. He feels George’s movements seize up and slow for a fleeting moment before returning back to normal, but pays no attention to his halfhearted sigh and instead watches his slender fingers as he works.

“Dream, get off me.”

“No thanks,” he says simply, eyes still intently roaming over George’s deft hands making quick

work of taking apart the chicken.

“I’ll leave you,” George threatens.

Dream just hums. “You won’t,” he says, and George visibly weakens at the confidence in his voice.

“No, I won’t,” he sighs.

After a few minutes of empty silence, George suddenly furrows his brow, cursing softly under his breath. Dream looks up at him, a concerned frown adorning his face.

“What’s wrong?”

“I messed up,” George mumbles, gesturing toward a pile of chicken he’d been shredding previously. Dream stares down at it, unsure of what slip-up George had made, and looks back up at him after a few seconds to find him watching him.

“Um,” he says. “George, it looks fine to me.”

George makes a face. “Really? Oh,” he says, and turns away again, shuffling awkwardly under Dream’s grip.

Smiling softly, Dream tilts his head up, eyes searching George’s face. “Seriously, you’re doing better than I thought you would.”

George scoffs, rolling his eyes. “Whatever,” he mutters, angling his head away to hide the heat spreading across his cheeks.

Dream watches him for a minute, and his eyes drop down to a cluster of freckles that rests on his cheekbone. Hesitantly, he presses a quick kiss to it, revelling in the way George scrunches his nose and leans away. Giggling, he does it again, and soon he’s littering George’s face with playful pecks while George tries in vain to push him off.

“Alright, Dream, stop, I’m serious,” he says, choking back a laugh, smushing Dream’s cheek as he pushes him away.

Dream ducks away from his hand, still laughing, and starts to loosen his grip with a muffled apology that really doesn’t come out all that apologetic. He freezes, however, when George wraps a hand around his wrist, keeping him from slipping away.

“No, stay, just stop being annoying.”

“Stay?” he repeats dumbly.

Sighing, George tips his head back, eyes falling closed as he gives a minute shake of his head, showcasing an emotion that seems to surpass annoyance and venture into some other territory.

“Yes, Dream, stay. I... I want you to.”

And so he does, because he’d be an idiot not to.

He’s not quite sure whether what he does next happens because of some miraculous wave of courage, or because of the sudden intimacy laced through the air between them, but he thinks it may be a little bit of both.

“George?” His voice comes out low, barely above a whisper, so he tries again, mentally

facepalming at his nervousness. “Can I, uh... can I tell you something?”

He feels George tense beneath him and he nods, keeping his focus intently on the task in front of him.

He takes a deep breath, hanging his forehead onto George’s shoulder, and continues. “Promise you won’t be mad? I mean, I don’t think you will, but there’s just always the off chance that you could be and I know it’s stupid but—”

“Okay, Dream, you’re rambling. Chill.”

Dream stops short and tentatively looks up to see George’s head now turned to face him, wiping his hand on a towel and bringing it to rest on Dream’s head, carding softly through his hair. The gentle, patient look that adorns his face whenever Dream starts stressing never fails to calm his nerves and get him back on track, and it’s one of the things he loves most about George.

“Okay, yeah,” he says, nodding. “I’m chill. I’m good. Um, I’m not sure where to start.”

“Just say it. It can’t be that bad, you’ll be fine.”

“Just say it?” he asks weakly, nerves knotting and twisting in his stomach, threatening to consume him.

“Yeah. You’re good, I’m here,” George comforts.

A beat passes.

“I love you. As more than... what we are now.”

The words tumble out hastily, falling one after another, and George’s face falls.

“Oh,” he says. “Oh, okay.”

“Okay?” Dream croaks out, unable to say anything else.

“As more?” George asks, carefully, eyes searching his, looking for clarification. Dream nods. “I don’t... I don’t think we can do this.”

Dream’s stomach drops, and he falters, mouth hanging limply open. “Okay.”

He knows, knows *painfully* well, that it’s far too late to backtrack; he’d ventured past an invisible point of no return long ago. It hurts, badly, but he cares too much about George, values their friendship far too much to push it any further. That, he tells himself, is why he waves a dismissive hand and detached himself from George. Not because it’s an avoidance tactic, not at all. He could face this if he wanted to.

He just really, *really* doesn’t want to.

George reaches out for a split second before dropping his hand, and instead he sets the knife down with a clatter and turns to fully face Dream. “Wait, I’m sorry, I wasn’t—”

“No, it’s fine, really. Just— just stop, please.”

George opens his mouth, on the verge of protesting, but then he snaps it shut and nods. “I’ll just go, then,” he says, motioning with his thumb before silently walking out the kitchen door, leaving Dream alone.

Dream grips the counter hard enough to turn his knuckles bone-white, letting out a frustrated sigh and cursing his own stupidity.

He feels as if he's on autopilot as he finishes cooking, silence hanging thickly in the air, trying to snake its way into his lungs and suffocate him, and he's only half present during dinner; the quiet clanging of silverware and hushed voices aren't enough to overshadow the concerned glances George seems adamant on sending his way. He religiously keeps his eyes trained on the plate before him, stubborn refusal masking deep-seated worry, and he doesn't think about George. He *doesn't*.

He doesn't think about George as he clears the table, and he doesn't think about George when he washes the dishes, and he *doesn't* feel an ache deep within himself each and every time he thinks back on the events of this stupid trip.

Most importantly, he doesn't think of George when he steps onto the porch, desperate to clear his head; doesn't wish he was next to him, rocking the porch swing back and forth and effortlessly spreading warmth through his core, even in the midst of a snowfall.

Dream lets his eyelids fall closed, allowing the frigid air fill his lungs, feeling as if the chill alone spreads prickling veins of frost through his chest, and he tries not to think about—

“I don't think we can do this.”

—about the way George's skin feels against his own, the gentle ring of his laugh, almost always just for Dream, the patience he holds no matter how frustrated Dream gets with something.

He blinks his eyes open, leaning his weight onto his arms resting on his knees, and stares out at the rapidly darkening remnants of sunset that fall across the trees in the yard, bathing them in faded shades of amber and crimson that bleed through the rustling leaves. His eyes follow the last rays of sun to where they lay on the edge of the stairs, casting wavering reflections on the stone, and he focuses on the way they shift slowly with the rise of the moon in a desperate attempt not to let his mind run rampant.

It's fine, he tells himself. *It's fine, because it has to be.*

Chapter End Notes

no it's not

Christmas Morning (Is Better With You)

Chapter Notes

sorry for my absence LOL but im back with the last chapter ! i didn't want to rush it just for the sake of getting it posted so i took extra time until i liked the way it turned out (and also i have zero work ethic)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The soft click of the door opening rings out louder than it should in the stillness of the night, and the porch light turning on sends searing pain through the back of Dream's eyelids, drawing a small noise of surprise from the back of his throat as he blinks rapidly.

Please, God, don't let that be George.

The stark contrast between his coexisting desperation to be near George and the pit of fear that looms in his stomach at the thought of being alone with him is enough to make it drop, a melancholic parody of the first drop on a roller coaster.

And, he thinks, there's never just one drop.

"Dream?"

Reluctantly, he turns his head, and his fearful suspicions are confirmed. George stands in the doorway, looking out at him with glassy eyes. He wants to tell him to go away, to put distance between them for as long as possible, but the look on his face has him gesturing to the spot next to him in an open invitation against his own better judgement.

George fidgets awkwardly for a moment longer, hand rubbing at the back of his neck and eyes flickering between the swing and Dream's face, then gives a small nod and makes his way over. "Hi," he says with what's meant to be a comforting smile.

Dream sighs. "Hi."

He watches as George shuffles around, seemingly unable to find a comfortable position. He doesn't blame him, the frigid wood isn't exactly pleasant, but eventually he gets fed up with the fabric of his sweatpants brushing against his thigh and reaches out a hand to still him.

"Sorry," George says sheepishly.

"It's fine." Dream pulls back as quickly as he'd reached out, not wanting to hold onto him for longer than he has to— not wanting to make him uncomfortable. "Why are you out here? Did you need something?"

George's brow draws together in a frown. "No, I didn't need anything. Well, actually, kind of, I needed to talk to you. I wanted to talk to you."

"About what, George?" Dream laughs, though it lacks any humor. "I think you've said enough."

"I haven't," he argues, unwavering beneath his intent gaze.

“Haven’t you?”

“No.”

Drawing in a deep breath, Dream relents, dropping his shoulders and feeling some of the tension dissipate from his body. George’s guarded expression relaxes at the sight, and Dream silently urges him on.

“I love you, Dream.”

Dream’s chest tightens, lungs folding in on themselves and knotting at the base of his throat, both at the choice of words and the weight surrounding them, and he *really* doesn’t want to be having this talk right now. Doesn’t want to hear about how George loves him dearly, as a friend, and wants nothing to change between them because of his newfound feelings. He can’t handle that right now.

He shifts uncomfortably, moving further toward the far end of the swing. “Okay, fuck off.”

“I’m being serious, I do,” George insists, face contorting in a blatant show of uneasiness that contradicts the certainty of his words. “You didn’t give me a chance to *explain* earlier. I lo— I feel the same.”

Staring numbly, Dream’s mouth passes silently over invisible words laced with confusion, trying desperately to grasp at some sort of understanding. “So then you— why did you say we couldn’t do this?” he rasps.

“I’m... not really sure what to say. This is hard,” George answers honestly.

“It’s *hard*?” George blanches at the harsh tone of his voice, and he backtracks slightly, remembering who he’s talking to and trying to remain patient as he pleads with George. “Could you at least try?”

George looks pained as he tilts his head, avoiding Dream’s eyes. “I don’t know if I can.”

Unfortunately, he can only be patient for so long before the lit fuse runs out of space to burn.

Scoffing, Dream pushes himself up, moving to leave through the door George had only bothered to close to a crack before stepping out, but a cold hand curls around his wrist and pulls him back down.

He watches as George slips his hand carefully from his wrist to his palm and slots their fingers together, burying their hands deep into the pocket of his hoodie while he pulls his knees up to his chin and continues staring vacantly at the line of trees.

“George, please,” he whispers.

“I’m trying, I am. I’m just not good at this.” George pauses for a second, taking a steadying breath before continuing. “I just... I know that communication and affection is, like, an important thing for you.”

“It is,” Dream agrees, eyeing him warily.

“And I was worried, I *am* worried, because I have a hard time with words and feelings, and expressing them. I like you, so much, but I didn’t want you to be stuck in a relationship with someone who can’t even give you what you need,” he finishes with a small sigh.

And Dream *freezes*. Freezes, short circuits, can't do anything but stare blankly for what he absently registers as far too long.

"George," he murmurs, heart stuttering in his chest as his brain finally kickstarts. "You're so stupid."

George snaps his eyes up to meet Dream's, lifting his head to showcase the utterly taken aback look painted across his face. "I'm— what?"

"You heard me. You're an idiot," he says, scooting closer to deliver an affectionate bump to his shoulder.

"Yeah, sorry, I'm not sure I follow."

Dream rolls his eyes. "George, I wouldn't want to be with you if I thought the relationship would suck. Verbal communication isn't the only kind of affection."

"Yeah, but it's *yours*," George frowns, shrugging him off. "What if we did something more than this and we just *don't work*? We're too different or something and we can never talk through it? It'd ruin our friendship, I don't want to lose that."

"I don't know if this helps or not, but if we did start dating, I don't think anything would really change. Like, at all. Literally just the label."

"Labels come with new expectations," George points out.

Sighing, Dream squeezes his hand, rubbing small circles at the base of his thumb. "And you think you won't meet the expectations?" When George nods, so does he, content with his newfound understanding of the situation and set on guiding George through it. "That's okay. Change is stressful. There's nothing that'll really change that, you just have to ride it out and hope for the best."

"Not if riding it out means losing what we have now."

"We aren't losing anything, George. The only expectation I have of you is that you're you, and that's not gonna change. You have your own way of doing things, and I love you for it," Dream muses, searching George's face as he speaks.

"So you'd be okay if I didn't say things often?" George asks skeptically, not having to elaborate on what *things* are.

A lazy smile spreads across Dream's face. "Of course I would. Idiot."

George matches his smile and surges forward to wrap his arms around Dream's waist, knees falling against his leg as he tucks Dream's head into his shoulder. Dream breathes him in, nose pressing into the warmth of the space where his neck meets his shoulder, and he vaguely wonders if it's weird to want to memorize the smell of gingerbread and vanilla that lingers on his best friend.

No, scratch that. He's perfectly within his rights.

"Dream?" George breathes out.

Dream hums in response, reluctantly detaching himself to look up at him and meeting eyes that shine with the cold reflection of icicles that line the roof above them, and something warmer beneath that. Something that manages to effortlessly melt the frost from the depths of his lungs as

George helps him slip his hand from his own to cup the nape of his neck.

The touch is tender, skin burning where they connect, and he applies the slightest bit of pressure to draw him forward. George follows easily— they're so close he can feel George's shallow breath ghosting over his skin, can hear the way it shakes faintly.

A moment stretches on in which neither of them moves, simply staying in the intimacy and the comfort of one another's touch with nothing between them but the understanding of a significant boundary crossed.

Then again, it was crossed long ago. They just hadn't acknowledged it until now.

Letting his lips part, Dream dips his chin down to let their mouths brush, and it's like opening a floodgate of feelings long pushed away as George tugs him forward and kisses him, and Dream is *floating*.

It's not perfect, by any means. Their noses bump softly against each other and quiet breathy laughs interrupt every few seconds— it's not perfect, but it might as well be. Dream had thought this moment would be at least somewhat anticlimactic, as it usually is when you reach the end of wanting something so *badly*, and yet somehow, the real thing is better than any stupid fix-it scenario he could've conjured up.

When they pull apart, neither one of them can keep the dumb grins off of their faces. George knocks their foreheads together softly, bunching a hand in the fabric of Dream's sweatshirt as a small shiver racks his body.

"So," he says.

"So," Dream parrots absently, admiring the scrunch of George's nose and the way he probably doesn't even realize he's doing it.

"I feel like I'm in one of those stupid Hallmark movies," George huffs, face dropping into a frown with playful ease.

A loud wheeze tears its way out of Dream's throat and he doubles over, letting his head fall onto the edge of George's shoulder and ignoring the annoyed yelp it draws from him. "Do they even make gay Hallmark movies?" he manages out into the fabric of his hoodie.

"We'll be the first," George deadpans, gently smacking his arm in an attempt to pry him away.

"We'll be making history, then." Dream relents and straightens back up, patting George's head apologetically and mocking the face he makes at him in return.

"Historians'll probably say we were very close friends," George snorts.

Suppressing another bout of wheezes, Dream shakes his head. "You're such an idiot."

"I'm not."

"Are too."

George rolls his eyes in lieu of responding, and a brief silence settles between them as George shifts uncomfortably. Catching it, Dream shuffles around, moving George's leg so that it's draped over his own and his back is no longer digging into the arm of the swing.

George lazily hooks his arms over Dream's shoulders and sucks in a quiet breath, and Dream comes to the muted realization that they've probably done this backwards. You're supposed to talk all your feelings out *before* making out on your family's porch like two teenagers.

He opens his mouth to voice this to George, but George beats him to it.

"Are we, um..." He trails off, gesturing vaguely with his hands behind Dream's neck.

Chuckling, Dream runs a feather-light finger along George's chin. "Do you want to be?"

"I think I'd like that. I like you," George murmurs, smiling against his hand. "I like having this."

"Yeah? You're okay with this? You're, like, ready?"

Dream waits with bated breath as George pauses to think, eyes flickering back and forth between Dream's as he contemplates his words. Finally, he gives a near imperceptible nod and smiles.

"Yeah. As long as you are, so am I," he says, pressing their foreheads together.

Dream wastes no time swooping in to recapture his lips. They press back and forth against each other, moving in tandem, unhurried as George slips his fingers into Dream's hair and threads them through absentmindedly.

Dream sighs contentedly when George moves a hand down to the small of his back, delivering a gentle touch that only serves to draw them closer together. He lets his hands trail along anywhere and everywhere he can get at—his arms, legs, stomach, face, through his hair; trying to memorize every curve and feeling beneath his fingertips for fear of this all being ripped away from him too soon.

"Okay, okay, Dream," George mutters against his lips, smiling apologetically when Dream chases after him with a small whine as he pushes him gently back.

"What," he huffs, still mourning the loss of the closeness they'd had only moments ago.

"I'm *cold*," George says, punctuating his words with a soft flick to Dream's forehead. "Can we please go back inside now?"

"Oh, shit. Yeah, sorry," Dream says sheepishly, realizing with a start that they're still outside in the cold and snow.

They clumsily stand up, limbs knocking together in their mutual refusal to let go of one another. Despite the awkwardness of the situation, they make their way through the door, with Dream kicking it closed behind them as George mutters a halfhearted explanation to the small group that's settled themselves in the living room. They ignore the skeptical looks thrown their way and venture into their shared room.

A faint tease from Sapnap about making sure to lock the door rings through the house, and George stifles a laugh as he tugs Dream by the hand to lay with him on the bed.

"Hey, George," Dream starts, his wide smile bordering painful, and George looks up at him expectantly. "I get to call you my boyfriend now."

George scoffs. "You've *been* doing that, dumbass."

"Yeah, but now I get to mean it," Dream teases, draping an arm over George's waist and bumping

their noses together.

“Yeah, I guess you do,” George says, and a smile of his own adorns his face despite the annoyed tone he pushes into his voice.

Dream revels in the way George leans into his touch, and how his eyes crinkle at the corners when his smile rings genuine and true. A fleeting thought crosses his mind as he’s lifting a hand to trace over his lips, and he pauses, hand suspended in midair as George gives him a quizzical look.

“Does this mean that neither of us lose the bet?”

Snorting, George rolls his eyes. “You wish. No, you definitely lost. You owe me a muffin.”

“How’d I *lose*?” Dream protests indignantly.

“Are you serious? You couldn’t even go two weeks without confessing your undying love for me. That counts as telling the truth.”

“Who said it’s *undying*?” Dream pulls away to crawl beneath the comforter, and George follows closely after. “If you aren’t careful, my love for you might just wither away and die.”

George quirks an eyebrow. “Oh, will it, now?”

“No,” Dream admits. He runs a hand through George’s hair and he sighs, hooking an ankle over Dream’s and using it to tug him in.

Closing his eyes, George shuffles around, tangling their legs together and looping his arms around Dream’s waist. “I’m tired,” he mumbles into Dream’s chest, words coming out muffled in the fabric of his shirt.

Dream smiles softly, staring unabashedly down at him. “Then go to sleep.”

“What does it *look* like I’m doing, Dream?”

“I don’t know, ballroom dancing?” Dream suggests, laughing quietly when George scoffs at him and feebly knees him in the leg.

“Shut up, you’re such an idiot. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, George. Love you,” he says, and George gives a small hum as he burrows his face in deeper.

Dream absolutely adores being able to press a chaste kiss to the crown of George’s head before they fall asleep, devoid of false pretenses and crippling pining.

—

“Go *away*, George,” Dream groans, snatching his pillow back and shoving it over his head in a vain attempt to block out the sound of George’s voice.

It’s early, *far* too early, and he couldn’t care less about how much he loves his boyfriend because he very much does *not* in this moment. Five in the morning is too early for any man to be awake—anyone who disagrees is wrong.

George, however, persists anyway. “Dream, it’s Christmas, get your fat ass out of bed and come out with me.”

“Aw, you think my ass is fat?”

“Yeah, extremely. Now will you please get up?” George asks, useless hopefulness lilted in his voice.

Instead of responding, Dream just reaches a hand out to blindly swat at George, giggling at the annoyed reaction it elicits from him.

“Whatever. You’re the worst, I hate you.”

“Yeah, yeah, I suck, boohoo. Five more minutes. Merry Christmas,” Dream mumbles tiredly into the fabric of the pillow.

“Merry Christmas,” George says, smile evident in his voice. The atmosphere around them falls silent as Dream feels the bed dip at the edge, signalling George sitting down as he presumably waits.

After what’s probably around a minute or so of trying and failing to fall back asleep, Dream abandons his efforts in favor of lifting the corner of the pillow to peek out, cracking one eye open to see George fidgeting at the end of the bed. Sighing, he mentally prepares himself for the cold air before tossing the pillow away and shoving the blanket off in one swift move.

Wincing as goosebumps prickles his exposed skin, he sits up, languidly pulling on George’s waist. When he doesn’t take the hint, Dream just flops his head down to rest on the nape of his neck with a dramatic groan.

“You’re such a baby,” George teases, reaching an arm behind his head to play with the messy strands of Dream’s hair that fall against his back.

“It’s *cold*. What’d you do, leave a window open?” Dream says, giving the back of George’s head the most unimpressed stare he can muster.

George twists his head around to glance at Dream with an odd look. “Yeah, that’s exactly what I did, Dream. In a room with no windows. You know you can go back to sleep?”

“Nah.” Dream nudges him forward, urging him off the bed as he speaks. “I’m up now, let’s just go.”

Grinning, George wraps a hand around his arm and pulls him toward the door with no hesitation, softening his movements only when he notices Dream’s stumbling walk and hooded eyes.

“You’re sure you don’t want to go back to bed?” he asks, eyeing him skeptically.

Dream shrugs and lowers his voice as they pass by rooms filled with people who are still sleeping. He envies them. “Would you come with me?”

“Nope,” George says, popping the *p*, and Dream hastily shushes him with a smile.

“Then yeah, I’m sure. I’m wide awake, Georgie.”

George gives him a look that says *this isn’t what a wide awake person looks like*, but Dream just ignores it and instead chooses to stick his tongue out at him childishly, earning a huff and a small shove when they reach the living room.

“C’mere,” George says, leading him toward the couch, but Dream falls behind.

“Not yet,” he murmurs, ducking down to catch George in a chaste kiss. George smiles into it, lips

curving against Dream's, and Dream feels any last traces of sleep dissolve when he pulls back just enough to pepper kisses across his face.

"Come *on*, Dream." George playfully nips at Dream's nose and laughs when he scrunches it in faux distaste. Dream relents, letting himself be pulled down onto the couch only to reach out again in protest when George moves to walk away.

George pushes his hand down with a chuckle. "I'll literally be back in two seconds, chill."

He leans over the arm of the couch, straining his neck to peer behind it, and grabs a cord from the ground. He stretches it around the corner and plugs it into another cord that hangs down from the ceiling, flooding the room with colorful light.

The dancing lights sear into the back of Dream's tired eyes and he blinks a few times in annoyance. The pain, however, is quickly forgotten the moment his vision comes back into focus and he sees George.

"I felt bad that we never got to go out and see the lights, so," George says, gesturing vaguely as he looks around. Dream only nods, too preoccupied to answer.

The lights strung up around the room cast deep shadows over George's face, red and green hues dancing over his delicate features, and it feels like all of the air has been knocked out of Dream's lungs because *shit*, he is *so pretty*. And he's *his*.

George sinks down onto the couch next to him, resting his head on his shoulder and pulling a fleece blanket from the arm of the couch. As he drapes it over their laps, curling his legs into Dream's side, he looks up to meet Dream's eyes and makes a face at him.

"What?" he asks, fidgeting under the sudden attention.

Dream just shrugs. "You just look really nice right now."

"Aw, is my pretty privilege distracting you?" George says with an airy laugh. "Poor Dream."

Unfazed, Dream brings a hand up to tap at the underside of George's chin. George melts into his touch automatically, looking up at him with shining eyes that reflect entrancing patterns of sparkling lights, never failing to draw Dream in so closely the line between them begins to blur in his mind.

"It always is," he whispers.

Then, grinning, he drops his touch altogether, earning a noise of annoyance from George.

"Good to know you're fully awake now," George grumbles, flicking Dream's knee under the blanket.

"Well, I wouldn't say *fully* awake. I'm still tired."

Giving a quiet hum, George nudges his cheek with the top of his head, soft hair tickling the skin beneath it. "On a scale from '*about to drop dead*' to '*awake enough to drive*' where would you say you're at?"

"Awake enough to drive," Dream says. "Probably without crashing the car."

"*Probably without crashing the car*," George mocks. This time, he's quick enough to grab

Dream's hand before he can flick him in retaliation, and a triumphant smile spreads across his face.

"Shut up. Hey, speaking of driving," Dream starts, gently pulling his hand from George's grip, "there's a cafe a little while away from here. Do you want to go get your dumb muffin before everyone wakes up?"

A look of surprise washes over George's face for a fleeting moment at Dream's offer before he airily laughs and shakes his head. "No, get me one another time. I want to stay here."

"Yeah? Why's that?" Dream asks, softly tapping George's thigh as he swings it over his legs, settling in his lap and burying his face in his shoulder. The blanket falls over his back and pools around them, but neither of them can be bothered to readjust it.

"It's warm," he mumbles, lips brushing against Dream's neck just fleeting and light enough to make him shiver in his still half conscious state.

George bunches the fabric of Dream's shirt in his hands and Dream allows him to stay there in comfortable silence for a moment. Briefly, he wonders how he got so lucky— his best friend, his best friend who he's been hopelessly pining after for years, his best friend who he's *kissed*, is in his arms. And, by some miracle, loves him back.

"What're you thinking about?"

Dream hums. "Just you."

"Me?" George lifts his head to look up at him with questioning eyes.

"Yes, you. Do you wanna hear a secret?" When George nods, Dream grins and presses into him, dropping his voice into a whisper he has to strain to hear. "I didn't get you a Christmas present."

Scoffing, George puts on the most offended look he can muster, visibly trying his hardest not to crack a smile. "I can't believe you right now. How dare you."

"Yeah? I'm a broke college student, George, what was I supposed to do?" When George doesn't respond, instead opting to simply give him a disappointed stare, he asks, "did *you* get *me* anything?"

"I'm enough of a present on my own."

"You are," Dream agrees. "You know, you're what I asked Santa for this year."

George stifles a laugh. "Oh, yeah? What'd you do, write a letter to him and everything? Mail it to the North Pole, maybe?" he teases, leaning in close to enunciate his words.

Snorting, Dream rolls his eyes, looking fondly down at his lover. He tilts his chin up, drawing him in until the tips of their noses brush against each other lightly. "Shut up, c'mere."

"No, no, I want to hear this," George manages out, shaking his head. "Did you also leave him milk and cookies? Carrots for the reindeer?"

He's laughing openly now, uncontrollable and mirthful. His eyes crinkle beautifully at the corners and the bridge of his nose creases, and though Dream itches to lean forward and kiss each and every line, take his time and pepper him in the affection that runs so deeply within him, he chooses to playfully scowl instead.

“Okay, quality time is over. I’m going back to bed,” he grumbles, moving to push George’s legs aside.

Though they both know Dream has no real intention of actually leaving, abandoning George in the brightly lit room to sit and enjoy it by himself, George gives in nonetheless. He grabs his face in his hands to hold him in place and smushes his cheeks together with a breathy laugh.

“You’re not going anywhere.”

When George tugs their lips together with a sense of finality, it’s almost as if nothing else matters—not the unbearable years spent pining, not the moonlight whispering through the closed blinds that serves as a reminder of how *painfully* early it is, not the looming prospect of the day ahead if them.

The only thing that matters is that George is here, in his arms, and he’s warm, and he’s *his*. The only thing he knows is the way George gently drags his fingers along Dream’s jaw until he’s smiling into the kiss, and he tastes like nighttime and comfort and unfiltered love.

Chapter End Notes

the end woohoo :D hope everyone enjoyed, the self imposed deadlines for this fic kicked my ass but it was fun to write. im working on a few other wips that’ll hopefully be ready to upload within the next week or so? keep an eye out for them if ur interested [:

also here’s my [twitter](#) !

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